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GRADUATE SCHOOL

Thesis

THE HUMOR OF OLIVER GOLDSMITH

by

Beatrice Smith

(B. S. in Ed., Boston University, 1928)

submitted in partial fulfilment of the  
requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

1936



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## THE HUMOR OF OLIVER GOLDSMITH

### I Purpose of the thesis

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the works of Oliver Goldsmith in an attempt to discover what in life he considered humorous, his attitude in exposing the objects of his humor, and the methods he used to get humorous effects.

### II Definition of humor

There are innumerable attempts to define humor, but all agree there is an element of contrast or incongruity in it. It is the comparison of the thing as it is with the thing as it should be. It explains why we consider funny the trivial mishaps of our friends particularly those involving a loss of dignity. It accounts for the element of unexpectedness in humor. The contrast between the actual and the ideal may be heightened and made more ridiculous by exaggeration or by understatement. It is always accompanied by a certain restraint and assumed gravity of purpose on the part of the humorist who appears to say one thing



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while he means another. It is this subtlety of expression, this slyness in giving the thing a queer twist to point out the inappropriateness of it that makes it funny. The humorist, first of all, must have a keen sense of the inconsistencies of life. Not only must he see characters and customs as they are in contrast to what they should be, but also he must be able to make others see these inconsistencies in such a light that by a subtle comparison with the ideal, the actual becomes ludicrous.

The word 'humor' is used to include anything that provokes a laugh or a smile, and also it is used in a narrower sense to mean that brand of sympathetic humor known as real humor to distinguish it from wit.

All the books that deal with humor have something to say about the difference between wit and this kind of real humor. This difference may be summed up in the familiar statement that wit laughs at people while humor laughs with them. The wit points out the eccentricities of others not in order to laugh with them or to reform them, but so that his own superiority may be established. The real humorist does not laugh at people. He laughs at their inconsistencies



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which is a very different thing because in all his laughter there is his consciousness that he has, if not the same shortcomings, then others equally as ridiculous.

There are at least two definitely contrasting philosophies of humor. One is the Hobbes' derision theory which maintains that all humor is caused by a feeling of pleasure and superiority when one beholds some deformity or deficiency in another. Only those individuals who have few abilities and are consequently disappointed in themselves find it necessary to compensate for their own deficiencies by laughing at others. This theory may have developed from an observation of primitive humor which was often quite brutal. (1) Stephen Leacock reminds us that a man with a broken leg looks as funny to a savage as a broken umbrella does to us. He goes on to say that while the Red Indian no longer exults and jibes over his tortured victims, this spirit of vindictiveness is still mistaken for humor and lives today in the brutal mocking of the satirical critic. A study of literature shows that it was more prevalent in Goldsmith's day, than it is in ours. It

(1) Leacock, Stephen Humor, its Theory and Technique  
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(1) Leacock, Stephen, *Humor, Its Theory and Technique*  
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is the philosophy of wit rather than of real humor.

The philosophy of real humor is excellently  
(1)  
described by Cazamian in the following words: "Philosophy of humor is made up of the acceptance of the stubborn contradictions which our endeavour in all fields fail to eradicate ..... An acceptance not inert, since it is lively, and may be ironical; not insipid, since it is pungent, and the pungency may even shade off into bitterness, but the natural outcome of which is a tolerance, a readiness to understand, almost to sympathize: a broad genial humanity, if not necessarily, as has often been said, a tenderness and a love."

Goldsmith's comments upon humor

In an early essay, 'The Present State of Polite Learning', published April 1759, Goldsmith gives the difference between wit and humor.

(2)

"Wit raises human nature above its level; humor acts a contrary part, and equally depresses it. To expect exalted humor is a contradiction in terms; and the critic, by demanding an impossibility from the comic poet, has, in effect, banished new comedy from the stage. But, to put the same thought in a different light, when an unexpected similitude in two objects strikes the imagination; in other words, when a thing is wittily expressed, all our pleasure turns into admiration of the artist, who had fancy enough to draw the picture. When a thing is humorously described, our burst of laughter proceeds from a very different cause;

(1) Cazamian Development of English Humour - p 162  
(2) The Present State of Polite Learning - Prior ed.  
p452





we compare the absurdity of the character represented with our own and triumph in our conscious superiority."

In another essay later in the same year, he contradicts this preference to wit, in a passage disagreeing with the Hobbes' theory of laughter.

(1)

"Mr. Hobbes, a celebrated philosopher of his nation, maintains that laughing proceeds from our pride alone. This is only a paradox if asserted of laughing in general, and only argues that misanthropical disposition for which he was remarkable.

To bring the causes he assigns for laughing under suspicion, it is sufficient to remark, that proud people are commonly those who laugh least. Gravity is the inseparable companion of pride. To say that a man is vain because the humor of a writer, or the buffoneries of a harlequin, excite his laughter, would be advancing a great absurdity. We should distinguish between laughter inspired by joy, and that which arises from mockery. The malicious sneer is improperly called laughter."

Goldsmith's own humor supports this latter view that real humor does not arise from pride. A common manifestation of wit is found in the pun. Goldsmith denounces the pun as a low form of humor. In the 'Life of Richard Nash', he gives an example of a vicious pun told by the Beau.

(2)

"Nash, though no great wit, had the art of sometimes saying rude things with decency, and rendering them pleasing by an uncommon turn. But most of the good things attributed to him, which have found their way into the jest-books, are no better than puns.

(1) The Bee Prior ed. vol. I p 142

(2) Life of Richard Nash Prior ed. vol III p 339



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The smartest things I have seen are against him. One day in the Grove he joined some ladies, and asking one of them who was crooked, whence she came? she replied, 'Straight from London.' 'Confound me, madam,' said he, 'then you must have been damnably warped by the way.' "



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### III Influences that made Goldsmith a humorist.

#### Heredity

Goldsmith was descended from a Spanish family of the name of Romeiro which came to England in the time of Philip and Mary. His mother counted Oliver Cromwell among her ancestral connections and it was from this gentleman that Goldsmith got his first name.

#### Mother

It would be difficult to trace Goldsmith's inclination toward humor from the austere Cromwell, but his mother seems to have inherited some of his serious characteristics. Goldsmith and his mother were incompatible and they were separated and estranged for the last twenty years of her life. When we read of the folly in Goldsmith's youth it is easy to understand why a mother, descended from Oliver Cromwell, might have become impatient with him.

#### Father

Goldsmith's father was a clergyman of good education but with very limited means. It is supposed that the Man in Black in "Citizen of the World", and the Vicar in "Vicar of Wakefield" are



History

A classical was descended from a  
Spanish family of the name of the Spanish name of  
England in the time of Philip and Mary. His name  
or changed Oliver Cromwell, but an Englishman  
and it was from this Englishman that  
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descriptions of Goldsmith's father. It is only necessary to read these tenderly drawn portraits to realize that Goldsmith must have had a great deal of respect and love for his father, and to see that a man with the improvidence, good-nature, and liberality of Goldsmith might well be the son of such a father.

Humorists have a wider and more sympathetic understanding of human nature than other men have. This quality Goldsmith may have had from his father either through inheritance or association. From his mother he may have derived that keen sense of the actualities of life which is also indispensable to the humorist. These two contradictory tendencies, one which made it possible for Goldsmith to see the folly in life, and the other which made him love people none the less for their follies, which made him partake himself in these same follies, these two tendencies united in helping to make Goldsmith a humorist.

### Environment

#### Birthplace

Oliver Goldsmith was born in November 1728 at Pallas, an Irish hamlet, in a tumbledown



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himself more the less for their father, which made  
him picture himself in these same father, these  
two tendencies united in helping to make Goldblatt  
immortal.

Development

Birthplace

Oliver Goldblatt was born in November  
1890 at St. Louis, an Italian neighborhood, in a tenement.

farmhouse near the river Inny. While he was still a child, the family moved into a large house near the village of Lissoy.

### Influences of Ireland

Goldsmith's family were English Protestants but they had long been settled in Ireland and Goldsmith had none of that antipathy for the Irish people which was possessed by many Englishmen in Ireland. From his seventh until his ninth year the boy had for a teacher an old quartermaster, an Irish Protestant, named Tom Bryne. From him Goldsmith learned innumerable stories of ghosts, banshees, and fairies. Bryne spoke the Irish language and composed Irish verses. Young Oliver at this time began to scribble doggerel. He also developed a passionate love for Irish music and a great admiration for the blind Irish composed, Carolon.

Since Goldsmith was connected with Ireland so closely it is interesting to observe some of the characteristics of Irish humor which may be found in Goldsmith's works. Irish humor is noted for its drollery and its connection with subjects like poverty and funerals which ordinarily are treated with gravity. Goldsmith had this ability to make any subject interesting. As part of his hack work he wrote several pieces such as, "An Inquiry Into the Present State of Polite Learning", and several prefaces, whose purpose



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was to adapt the contributions of scholars to laymen. These compilations are much more readable than the ordinary epitome of Goldsmith's time. Although they are often inaccurate, they hold the interest of the reader and now and then we find sparks of humor in them.

There is an element of tenderness in Irish humor which is present in nearly all of Goldsmith's work. His sympathetic treatment of Beau Nash, whose life, dedicated to a slavish adulation of wealth and position, represented all that Goldsmith despised, is one of the best examples of his capacity for humorous tenderness. Irish humor can be boisterous as well as tender since the Irish are a merry people. Goldsmith showed this quality in his conversation.

### Education

A large capacity for merriment does not make a humorist unless it is mixed with moments of sadness and serious reflection. Oliver Goldsmith began to have occasion for such moments during his early education. As a young boy, he was shy, thick, and awkward. His face, originally homely, was made even more unsightly by an attack of small-pox. A dislike for the monotonous routine of study and an inclination to be a leader in mischief made him unpopular with his superiors. So we find that, in spite of his good-nature,



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friendliness, and generosity, he was ridiculed by the boys and flogged by the masters. At seventeen he entered Trinity College as a sizar. He felt further humiliation in this humble role and continued to neglect study for play. It was at this time that he began to write ballads which he sold at a shop at the sign of the Reindeer in Mountrath Court, for money which more often than not he would hand immediately to a beggar.

### Travel

After receiving his Bachelor's degree Goldsmith tried his hand at several professions, the Church, tutoring, and law. In each he failed chiefly because of lack of inclination. He decided to emigrate to America, and his relations who seem to have been unusually patient with his indecision, fitted him out with a horse and money. In six weeks he returned home on an old nag with his money lost in gaming. His obliging uncle again provided him with funds to study medicine in Edinburgh. He learned little of medicine and soon he took up a wandering existence through Flanders, France, Switzerland, and Italy, supporting himself by playing his flute. He returned to England seemingly a failure who had wasted both time and money. In reality his travels bore rich fruit as it was from these experiences that he gained his sympathetic insight



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into life and his knowledge of human nature that was to serve him so well both as a humorist and in his serious verse. He had gained an international point of view which he emphasized several times in his essays by pointed ridicule of provincialism.

That Goldsmith was developing a power of humorous observation at this time may be seen from the following description of the dress of Dutch men which is to be found in one of his letters to his Uncle Contarine from Leyden in 1754.

"Upon a head of lank hair he wears a half cock'd Narrow leav'd hat loe'd with black ribbon, no coat but seven waiscoats and nine pairs of breeches so that his hips reach almost up to his arm pits. This well cloth'd vegetable is now fit to see company or make love."

### Later Life

The remaining eighteen years of his life after he returned from these travels were spent under circumstances which might not impress one as being conducive to humor. Much of his time was taken up with hack work, and although in the last years of his life he made a comfortable income, he was always in debt because of gambling, extravagant living, and impulsive generosity. He paid large sums to his tailor for clothes which were notorious for their gaudy colors. These clothes brought upon him the censure of Boswell and other early critics who saw in them evidences of vanity. More sympathetic

(1) Balderston-Collected Letters of Oliver Goldsmith p 22



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(1) Balcanquhall-Goldsmith Letters of Oliver Goldsmith p 22

commentators have excused the gay clothes on the ground that Goldsmith wore them either to compensate for his natural homeliness or to win favor with Mary Hornbeck. Under the spell of Goldsmith's appealing personality as revealed by his writings some of these biographers have gone occasionally to rather absurd lengths to excuse his failings. One such biographer, as a reason for Goldsmith's unusual taste in clothes, suggests rather hopefully that Goldsmith may have been color-blind. It is not unreasonable to believe that Goldsmith liked his gay clothes for themselves just as he liked lively company. They were all in keeping with his natural merriment, which tempered by periods of despondency, made him a humorist. That he had despondent moments is revealed in some of his letters, but although they seem to have been acute while they lasted, we must believe that they were of short duration as he is often in the best of spirits, enjoying the company of the Hornbecks, and basking in the friendship of the leading men of his day. In spite of the very real hardships of poverty which he brought upon himself, Goldsmith was immune from lasting despondency because he had a constitutional gaiety, or as he himself says, a "knack of hoping."

(1) Jenks - In the Days of Oliver Goldsmith p 40



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#### IV Humor found in Goldsmith's conversation and behaviour

Goldsmith's humor in his writings was appreciated by his contemporaries. Johnson<sup>(1)</sup> considered "She Stoops to Conquer" the best comedy for many years because of its success in making an audience merry. Other critics shared Johnson's opinion. For this reason it seems strange to some of his later biographers that the same humor in conversation should have been mistaken for bombast, petty jealousy, and blundering incoherence. According to Boswell's record, Goldsmith strutted about in gaudy clothing, chattering of his own merits, and upon occasion even<sup>(2)</sup> claiming more knowledge than Maupertius about the subject of astronomy. Horace Walpole described Goldsmith as an inspired idiot, and Garrick immortalized the idea in his playful epitaph:<sup>(3)</sup>

"Here lies Poet Goldsmith, for shortness called  
Noll,  
Who wrote like an angel, but talk'd like poor  
Poll."

More recent and more sympathetic biographers have explained this unusual behaviour as the functioning of Goldsmith's sense of humor which was of the rather exceptional variety that delights in satirizing the pretences of others either by an exaggerated self-depreciation, or by an assumed air of injury and self importance.

(1) Prior - "Life of Oliver Goldsmith" - p447

(2) Macaulay - "Oliver Goldsmith" - p276

(3) Prior - "Goldsmith's Works" - pl10



IV. Humor found in Goldsmith's conversation and behavior

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plained this unusual behavior as the functioning of

Goldsmith's sense of humor which was of the rather excep-

tional variety that delights in satirizing the pre-

ferences of others either by an exaggerated self-depre-

ciation, or by an assumed air of injury and self-importance.

(1) Prior - "Life of Oliver Goldsmith" - p. 447

(2) Macaulay - "Oliver Goldsmith" - p. 276

(3) Prior - "Goldsmith's Works" - p. 110

Goldsmith loved company and popularity, and it would have seemed absurd to him to sacrifice a good time in order to establish a reputation for dignity and dull conventionality. He intimates this in a letter to his brother Henry in 1754.<sup>(1)</sup>

"It is a good remark of Montaigne's that the wisest men often have friends, with whom they do not care how much they play the fool."

This comment shows that Goldsmith was not unconscious of the interpretation of his behaviour which was held by Boswell, and others of his kind to whom the deliberate lowering of one's dignity in order to amuse was incompatible with the dictates of common sense.

One contemporary, Sir Joshua Reynolds, who knew Goldsmith well, understood the motive behind his boisterous clowning.<sup>(2)</sup> Reynolds said that the poet often intentionally lowered his standard of thought in familiar conversation, trusting his character to be sufficiently supported by his works, because he wanted to be liked in society and feared the envy often shown a man of literary reputation.

(1) Dobson - "Life of Oliver Goldsmith" - p 64

(2) Prior - "Life of Oliver Goldsmith" - p 224



Goldsmith loved company and popularity, and it would have seemed absurd to him to sacrifice a good time in order to establish a reputation for dignity and self-conventionality. He intimates this in a letter to his brother Henry in 1754.

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Goldsmith often intentionally lowered his standard of thought in familiar conversation, treating his character to be sufficiently supported by his works, because he wanted to be liked in society and feared the envy often shown a man of literary reputation.

## V Goldsmith's treatment of incongruities

Like all humorists Goldsmith was alert in detecting the follies of men. He found humor in the incongruities<sup>of</sup> their social customs and in their petty vanities. These he treats not with the harsh satirical scorn of the reformer but with a mild satire which the victim himself could not but have found amusing.

Goldsmith is at his best in his humorous characters for in this field he shows that he is a master of the difficult art of real humor. That he found humor in situation is shown in all his works, but especially in the plays which depend upon this farcical type of humor almost entirely. It is only occasionally that he got humorous effects from the incongruities in words themselves. Witticisms and puns are found very infrequently in his works.

### Incongruities in society

The incongruities of society, many of which are manifested in hypocrisy and artificiality, are treated for the most part in the two books of essays, "The Bee" and "The Citizen of the World." Goldsmith found no new sources of humor. The frailties and follies of men have been the subjects of humor since ancient times. He discovered no new technique to get humorous effects. He is important because of his



## The scientific treatment of the human mind

Like all humanistic disciplines was almost in  
neglecting the scientific method, the human mind in the  
humanistic treatment of social sciences and in their social  
ventures. There is a close and with the human scientific  
action of the sciences and with a wide variety of the  
scientific method could not have found answers.

Humanism is at the heart of the humanistic character  
for in this field he shows that he is a master of the  
difficult and of real human. Let us look at the  
situation is shown in all his works, but especially in  
the other. It is shown upon the human type of  
human mind entirely. It is only occasionally that  
he got answers often from the humanistic in words  
the answer. Humanism and human are human very inter-  
quently in his works.

## Humanism in society

The humanistic of society, many of  
which are mentioned in humanistic and scientific,  
are directed for the most part in the books of answers,  
"The new" and "The old" of the world. Humanistic  
found no new sources of human. The humanistic and  
politics of man have been the subjects of human since  
ancient times. He discovered no new techniques to get  
humanistic effects. He is important because of his

broad sympathetic treatment of his subjects. Much of his humor about the incongruities of society is that kind of mild satire labelled by George Meredith, the Spirit of Comedy, which gently laughs at folly and aims at its correction, but feels none the less kindly toward the perpetrators of it. In the Introduction to (1) "The Bee," Goldsmith writes of future issues, "Thus much, however, he (the reader) may be assured of, that neither war nor scandal shall make any part of it..... Happy could any effort of mine, but for a moment, repress that savage pleasure some men find in the daily accounts of human misery." This ideal is retained throughout all of Goldsmith's works.

In the following section of this thesis typical quotations have been selected from Goldsmith's works and grouped under the subjects most frequently treated in his ridicule of society.

#### The Theater

In his search for incongruities it is easy to understand why Goldsmith ridiculed the theater. The artificialities of the sentimental drama, so popular in his time, would be especially distasteful to the sense of realism innate in every humorist. In an (2) early critical essay, "On the Stage" Goldsmith points

(1) The Bee - Prior ed. - vol. p 15

(2) Present State of Polite Learning - Prior ed. vol.p454





out these defects in the theater. Much more effective, however, are his later humorous essays on this same subject because in these instead of treating generalities, he selects concrete examples of absurdity and makes them subjects of laughter.

Goldsmith ridiculed the custom of allowing an elderly, homely actress to play the part of the sentimental heroine and he makes his ridicule most effective by stating what character she actually resembles.

(1)

"----what must be the entire perversion of scenical decorum, when, for instance, we see an actress, that might act the Wapping landlady without a bolster, pining in the character of Jane Shore, and, while unwieldy with fat, endeavoring to convince the audience that she is dying with hunger? "

In the following passage in which he deplores the bad habit some actors had of staring at the audience he might have found with little difficulty some individual offender to ridicule. Instead of doing this, it is a characteristic of his sympathetic nature that he brings out his point in the praise of an actress who does not offend in this way.

(2)

"---she never comes in staring round upon the company, as if she intended to count the benefits of the house, or at least to see as well as be seen."

How absurd it is for an actress to stop from her part to acknowledge the applause of the

(1) The Bee - Prior edition vol. I - p23

(2) " " " " " I - p49





audience is seen more clearly through the eyes of the perplexed tradesman who has come to the theater to see a queen.

(1)

"Suppose a sober tradesman, who once a year takes his shillings' worth at Drury-lane, in order to be delighted with the figure of a queen, the queen of Sheba for instance, or any other queen; this honest man has no other idea of the great but from their superior pride and impertinence: suppose such a man placed among the spectators, the first figure that appears on the stage is the queen herself, courtesying and cringing to all the company; how can he fancy her the haughty favorite of king Solomon the wise, who appears actually more submissive than the wife of his bosom."

Goldsmith imagines how distasteful hysterical acting must be to the actors and he puts the following passages in the mouth of a strolling player. The humor is heightened by exaggeration.

(2)

"To please in town or country, the way is to cry, wring, cringe into attitudes, mark the emphasis, flap the pockets, and labor like one in the falling sickness: that is the way to work for applause;."

In the "Citizen of the World," Goldsmith ridicules many of the same follies which he had ridiculed in "The Bee." The humor is increased by having them presented through the medium of the Chinese philosopher whose attitude is one of innocent surprise that such departures from common sense can be possible. In spite of his many disillusiones in England he approaches each

- (1) The Bee - Prior edition vol. I - p 50  
 (2) " " " " " I - p 244









new atmosphere began for the best. When we discovered that a whole new world opened the vision of the world, he was not just in a superior manner, but in a different way of seeing things. He was in his friends in China and the state of affairs in this foreign land. In this character of the world, he was actually two well-known names of the world, the world, an air of renewed excitement and the element of surprise.

With characteristic boldness, the Chinese philosopher finds it curious that the lowest classes are in the highest seats and are allowed to wear lace.

(1) The Chinese in general were placed in the lowest seats, and the poor were placed in the highest seats. The order of the world seemed to be inverted; those who were underfoot all the time, now enjoyed a temporary prominence, and became masters of the ceremony. It was they who called for the world, including every body freedom, and satisfying all the instincts of every in existence.

The old world cannot understand the new world. The old world cannot understand the new world. The old world cannot understand the new world.

(2) The old world cannot understand the new world. The old world cannot understand the new world. The old world cannot understand the new world.

In this instance the abundance of the world is shown. The world is shown in the world. The world is shown in the world.

soliloquy becomes more apparent when seen through the eyes of the Chinese.

(1)

"The third act now began with an actor who came to inform us, that he was the villain of the play, and intended to show strange things before all was over. He was joined by another, who seemed as much disposed for mischief as he; their intrigues continued through this whole division. If that be a villain, said I, he must be a very stupid one to tell his secrets without being asked; such soliloquies of late are never admitted in China."

The plot is forgotten in the frenzy of acting the sentimental drama.

(2)

"The fifth act began, and a busy piece it was, scenes shifting, trumpets sounding, mobs hallooing, carpets spreading, guards bustling from one door to another; gods, demons daggers, racks and ratsbane. But whether the king was killed, or the queen drowned, or the son was poisoned, I have absolutely forgotten."

The rivalry between theatres is ridiculed in this passage in which repetition and exaggeration are used with telling effect.

(3)

"Both houses have already commenced hostilities. War, open war, and no quarter received or given! Two singing women, like heralds, have begun the contest: the whole town is divided on this solemn occasion; one has the finest pipe, the other the finest manner; one curtsies to the ground, the other salutes the audience with a smile; one comes on with modesty which asks, the other with a boldness which extorts applause; one wears powder, the other none; one has the longest waist, but the other appears most easy; all, all is important and serious."

He had no use for plots which must be

- (1) Goldsmith - Citizen of the World - Prior ed. vol II p91  
 (2) " " " " " " " " " II p93  
 (3) " " " " " " " " " II p326





built around the affectations of each individual actor.

(1)

"One player shines in an exclamation, another in a groan, a third in a horror, a fourth in a start, a fifth in a smile, a sixth faints, and a seventh fidgets round the stage with a peculiar vivacity; that piece, therefore, will succeed best, where each has a proper opportunity of shining; the actor's business is not so much to adapt himself to the poet, as the poet's to adapt himself to the actor."

The Chinese philosopher reduces the art of writing the sentimental drama to a ridiculous simplicity.

(2)

"The great secret, therefore, of tragedy-writing at present, is a perfect acquaintance with theatrical ah's and oh's; a certain number of these interspersed with gods! tortures! rack! and damnation! shall distort every actor almost into convulsions, and draw tears from every spectator; a proper use of these will infallibly fill the whole house with applause."

Many of the subjects indicated in the earlier Essays and Letters are treated again in "The Vicar of Wakefield." Usually the humor is more subtle with each repetition. In this instance the strolling player in a conversation with the Vicar echoes the sentiments concerning the absurdity of the sentimental drama.

(3)

"I don't know that they imitate anything at all; nor indeed does the public require it of them; it is not the composition of the piece, but the number of starts and attitudes that may be introduced into it, that elicits applause. I have known a piece, with not one jest in the whole, shrugged into popularity, and another saved by the poet's throwing in a fit of the gripes."

(1) Goldsmith - Citizen of the World - Prior ed vol III p328

(2) " " " " " " " " " III p329

(3) " " " " " " " " " III p108





Fawning upon the great

One kind of hypocrisy, that of fawning upon the great, seriously aroused Goldsmith. Again and again he attacks this subject in the Essays, in the Letters of the Chinese philosopher, and most effectively in the character of Beau Tibbs. He holds this folly responsible for many evils among which are unhappiness in marriage, injustice to artists, degeneration of the ministry. He directs upon this subject all the force of his pen from gentle ridicule to the most biting satire of which he is capable.

Goldsmith's hatred of the role of flatterer was apparent at the age of twenty-five when he wrote his Uncle Contarine.

(1)

"I have spent more than a fortnight every second day at the Duke of Hamilton's, but it seems they like me more as a jester than as a companion; so I disdained so servile an employment; it was unworthy my calling as a physician."

(2)

He approved of Voltaire's refusal to be historian to the French king when he found he was supposed to be first flatterer of the state. In an early Essay Goldsmith has the strolling player tell how one lady who has been to London can sway the opinion of the entire audience in the country.

(1) Balderston - Letters of Oliver Goldsmith p 17

(2) Citizen of the World - Prior ed. vol II p182





(1)

"---I came on as Sir Harry, one hand stuck in my breeches and the other in my bosom, as usual at Drury-Lane; but instead of looking at me, I perceived the whole audience had their eyes turned upon the lady who had been nine months in London; from her they expected the decision which was to secure the general's truncheon in my hand, or sink me down into a theatrical letter-carrier. I opened my snuff-box, took snuff; the lady was solemn, and so were the rest; I broke my cudgel on alderman Smuggler's back: still gloomy, melancholy all, the lady groaned and shrugged her shoulders; I attempted, by laughing myself, to excite a smile; but the devil a cheek could I perceive wrinkle into sympathy: I found it would not do: all my good-humor now became forced; my laughter was converted into hysteric grinning; and while I pretended spirits, my eye showed the agony of my heart; in short, the lady came with an intention to be displeased, and displeased she was; my fame expired;--"

In the description of a dream, Goldsmith has another lady add to the self esteem of a would-be poet of noble birth. The superficial criticism of literature by ladies who based their judgment upon the social position of the author rather than upon the merits of the work was particularly annoying to him.

(2)

"A lady accosted a certain nobleman: 'My dear lord,' says she, 'are we to expect no production of yours this season? I am so fatigued with the works of those mercenary writers for bread, that I protest if I don't see something new of yours, I shall absolutely discontinue my studies, and return to piquet.' 'Excuse me, madam,' replied his lordship, 'I should be very willing to publish my works, if there were many such judges as you; but alas! we have neither taste, sentiment, nor genius amongst us; we are quite fallen; none are capable of distinguishing true delicacy: would

{1) Essays Prior ed. vol I p 247

(2) " " " " I p 205





you think, madam, that my volume of philosophical poems would not go off, and yet the very same judges had bought Pope's Works with great eagerness?"

In the same dream Goldsmith, greatly disgusted, tells of seeing a rich poet being flattered by a poor one.

(1)

"In another quarter I perceived a well-dressed poet reading his manuscript to a ragged brother, who seemed in raptures with every line of it; he praised the language, sentiment, and sublimity; shrugged up his shoulders in ecstasy, and flourished his hands with enthusiasm. As the emperors formerly paid poets for every line they liked, so on the contrary our ragged poet was paid for every line he happened to praise; the writer reading it to him not for the sake of his corrections but his flattery."

The experience of one who tried to be a flatterer shows the falsity of the position and sound very much like the recollection of a painful incident in the life of the author.

(2)

"I found, however, too soon, that his lordship was a greater dunce than myself; and from that very moment flattery was at an end. I now rather aimed at setting him right, than at receiving his absurdities with submission --- I was therefore discharged; my patron at the same time being graciously pleased to observe, that he believed I was tolerably good-nature, and had not the least harm in me. "

The Chinese philosopher ridicules the notion that the accident of a noble birth makes one not only a competent critic of art but a painter as well. This passage is an example of the way in which

(1) Essays Prior ed. vol I p206

(2) Citizen of the World - Prior ed. vol II p 115









...at the same time, the

...is made known to the

...and also for their

(1)

...the same time, the

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...the same time, the

...the same time, the

...the same time, the

...the same time, the

(2)

...the same time, the

select party of us to dine at Lady Grogram's an  
affected piece, but let it go no farther; a secret;"

That the nobles will make any sacrifice for a slight decoration from the king strikes the naive Chinese as most unusual.

(1)

"The princes of Europe have found out a manner of rewarding their subjects who have behaved well, by presenting them with about two yards of blue ribbon, which is worn about the shoulder. They who are honored with this mark of distinction are called knights, and the king himself is always at the head of the order. This is a very frugal method of recompensing the most important services; and it is very fortunate for kings, that their subjects are satisfied with such trifling rewards. Should a nobleman happen to lose his leg in battle, the king presents him with two yards of ribbon, and he is paid for the loss of his limb. Should an ambassador spend all his paternal fortune in supporting the honor of his country abroad, the king presents him with two yards of ribbon, which is to be considered as an equivalent to his estate. In short, while a European king has a yard of blue or green ribbon left, he need be under no apprehension of wanting statesmen, generals, and soldiers."

(2)

"Does the mayor of a corporation make a speech? he is instantly set down for a great man. Does a pedant digest his commonplace book into a folio? he quickly becomes great. Does a poet string up trite sentiments in rhyme? he also becomes the great man of the hour. How diminutive soever the object of admiration, each is followed by a crowd of still more diminutive admirers. The shout begins in his train, onward he marches towards immortality, looks back at the pursuing crowd with self-satisfaction;

(1) Citizen of the World Prior ed. vol. II p 268

(2) II II II II II II II II II II p 309





catching all the oddities, the whimsies, the absurdities, and the littlenesses of conscious greatness, by the way. "

Funeral elegies upon the great are ridiculed by the Chinese philosopher. Goldsmith reverts to this subject again in humorous criticism of the elegies written in honor of Beau Nash.

(1)

"But the most usual manner is this: Damon meets Menalcas who has got a gloomy countenance. The shepherd asks his friend, whence that look of distress? to which the other replies, that Pollio is no more. "If that be the case then," cries Damon, "let us retire to yonder bower at some distance off, where the cypress and the jessamine add fragrance to the breeze; and let us weep alternately for Pollio, the friend of shepherds, and the patron of every muse." - "Ah," returns his fellow shepherd, "what think you rather of that grotto by the fountain side? the murmuring stream will help to assist our complaints, and a nightingale on a neighboring tree, will join her voice in the concert." When the place is thus settled, they begin: the brook stands still to hear their lamentation; the cows forget to graze; and the very tigers start from the forests with sympathetic concern. By the tombs of our ancestors, my dear Fum, I am quite unaffected in all this distress; the whole is liquid laudanum to my spirits; and a tiger of common sensibility has twenty times more tenderness than I."

With a little exaggeration Goldsmith exposes Beau Nash's love of recognition from the great.

(2)

"They who know the town cannot be unacquainted with such a character as I describe; one, who though he may have dined in private upon a banquet served cold from a cook's shop, shall dress at six for the side box; one of those, whose wants are known to their laundress and tradesmen, and their fine clothes to half the nobility; who spend more in chair hire than

(1) Citizen of the World Prior ed. vol II p 420

(2) Life of Richard Nash Prior ed. vol III p 271





housekeeping, and prefer a bow from a lord to a dinner from a commoner."

Goldsmith finds that Nash was willing to accept flattery even from a murderer.

(1)

"I have before me a bundle of letters, all addressed from a pack of flattering reptiles, to 'his Honor' and even some printed dedications in the same servile strain. In these 'his Honor' is complimented as the great encourager of the public arts, as a gentleman of the most accomplished taste, of the most extensive learning, and, in short, of everything in the world.----Among this number was the highwayman, who was taken after attempting to rob and murder Dr. Handcock."

Genuine satire is not common in Goldsmith's works. When it is found it is directed, as in the following two examples, against an idea rather than against an individual.

Satire with an element of wit describes the way to fame in which wealth counts more than merit.

(2)

"As soon as a piece therefore is published, the first questions are, Who is the author? does he keep a coach? where lies his estate? what sort of table does he keep? If he happens to be poor and unqualified for such a scrutiny,, he and his works sink into irremediable obscurity; and too late he finds, that having fed upon turtle is a more ready way to fame than having digested Tully."

(3)

In his 'Life of Oliver Goldsmith', Macaulay points out how remarkable it is that Goldsmith, who had tramped about and lived among all kinds of people, should write with such uniform refinement. Upon

(1) Life of Richard Nash Prior ed. vol III p 330

(2) Citizen of the World Prior ed. vol II p 239

(3) Life of Oliver Goldsmith, by T. B. Macaulay p 271



...and prefer a boy from a lord to a dinner  
from a commoner."

Goldsmith finds that man was willing

to accept liberty even from a murderer.

(1)

"I have before me a bundle of letters  
all addressed from a pack of lettering venal, to  
his Honor's ever some printed declaration in the  
some service article. In the 'His Honor' is now  
presented as the first opportunity of the public eye,  
as a ventricle of the most accomplished taste, of the  
most extensive learning, and, in short, of everything  
in the world.---I know this number was his wayward  
and was taken after attempting to rob and murder it.  
"Lancelotti."

...contains satire to not concern in

Goldsmith's words. When it is read it is directed,

as in the following two examples, which are taken

rather than copied or imitated.

satire with an element of wit describes

the way to fame in which death counts more than merit.

(2)

"As soon as a class character is  
labeled, the least possible is done, and the author  
does he need a second hand? He is satisfied that sort  
of table does he need? He is determined to be good and  
unpublished for such a long time, and the same  
with the few, little, and the little, and the little  
time, that little, that little, that little, that little  
way to fame, having, directed, directed, directed."

(3)

In his 'Life of Oliver Goldsmith'

Macaulay points out how remarkable it is that Goldsmith

who had dreamed about and lived among all kinds of

people, should write with such a high refinement.

(4) Life of Oliver Goldsmith, ed. vol. I, p. 330

(5) Life of Oliver Goldsmith, ed. vol. II, p. 330

(6) Life of Oliver Goldsmith, ed. vol. III, p. 330

only one occasion is there any suggestion of coarseness in any of Goldsmith's works. In this satirical story against flattery of the great he approximates the stinging vulgarity of the satirical passages in Swift's "Guliver's Travels".

(1)

"The pitiful humiliations of the gentlemen you are now describing, said I, puts me in mind of a custom among the Tartars of Koreki, not entirely dissimilar to this we are now considering. The Russians, who trade with them, carry thither a kind of mushrooms, which they exchange for furs of squirrels, ermines, sables, and foxes. These mushrooms the rich Tartars lay up in large quantities for the winter; and when a nobleman makes a mushroom-feast, all the neighbors around are invited. The mushrooms are prepared by boiling, by which the water acquires an intoxicating quality, and is a sort of drink which the Tartars prize beyond all other. When the nobility and ladies are assembled and the ceremonies usual between people of distinction over, the mushroom broth goes freely round; they laugh, talk double-entendre, grow fuddled, and become excellent company. The poorer sort, who love mushroom-broth to distraction as well as the rich, but cannot afford it at the first hand, post themselves on these occasions round the huts of the rich, and watch the opportunity of the ladies and gentlemen as they come down to pass their liquor; and holding a wooden bowl, catch the delicious fluid, very little altered by filtration, being still strongly tinctured with the intoxicating quality. Of this they drink with the utmost satisfaction, and thus they get as drunk and as jovial as their betters. ---For my part, I shall never for the future hear a great man's flatterers haranguing in his praise, that I shall not fancy I behold the wooden bowl."

(1) Citizen of the World Prior ed. vol. II p 138



ON THE 10th DAY OF JANUARY 1964

IN THE COURT OF THE DISTRICT JUDGE

AT THE DISTRICT COURT HOUSE

IN THE CITY OF NEW YORK

THE PEOPLE OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK

VS.

JOHN J. FALCON

Defendant

ALLEGEDLY

IN VIOLATION OF

THE LAWS OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK

AND

THE LAWS OF THE UNITED STATES

IN THE MATTER OF



### Personal vanities

Goldsmith adds to our conception of the lady of the eighteenth century in several of his essays. Like some of his contemporaries he ridicules the time she spent in personal adornment but his chief quarrel seems to be with the woman who pretends to be learned. Addison's Clarinda and Pope's Belinda belong very definitely to the eighteenth century. The modern Miss can read of them with an air of superiority born of the knowledge that she is not guilty of their absurdities. Goldsmith's women, however, are not so dated. Cousin Hannahs in their sixties still may be found aping the dress of adolescence and Eudocias and Canidias are not unknown to the modern world. In the following passage Goldsmith deplores the folly of ladies in all following the same fashion.

(3)

" But not only ladies of every shape and complexion, but of every age too, are possessed of this unaccountable passion of dressing in the same manner. A lady of no quality travels fast behind the lady of some quality; and a woman of sixty is as gaudy as her granddaughter. I remember, a few days ago, to have walked behind a damsel, tossed out in all the gayety of fifteen; her dress was loose, unstudied, and seemed the result of conscious beauty. I called up all my poetry on this occasion, and fancied twenty Cupids prepared for execution in every folding of her white negligee. I had prepared my imagination for an angel's face; but what was my mortification to find

(1) Addison, Joseph - The Spectator No. 323

(2) Pope, Alexander - The Rape of the Lock

(3) Essays Prior ed. vol. I p34



Personal Notes

of which adds to the conception of the

day of the nineteenth century in general of the

time and space in general adjustment of the

actual scene to be with the woman who

very distinctly to the scene with

the scene of them with an air of

of the landscape that she is not

a picture, but a woman, however, and

be found again the scene of

and pictures are not unknown to the

In the following passage, the

of ladies in all following the

and not only ladies at every

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and every one, but every one

and every one, but every one



that the imaginary goddess was no other than my cousin Hannah, four years older than myself, and I shall be sixty-two the twelfth of next November."

The woman who takes herself too seriously is the subject of Goldsmith's ridicule in an essay in which he states his conviction that woman's place is in the home.

(1)

"Eudisia, the most frivolous woman in the world, condemns her own sex for being too trifling. She despises the agreeable levity and cheerfulness of a mixed company; she will be serious, that she will; and emphatically intimates, that she thinks reason and good sense very valuable things. She never mixes in the general conversation, but singles out some one man, whom she thinks worthy of her good sense, and in a half voice, or sotto voice, discusses her solid trifles in his ear, dwells particularly upon the most trifling circumstances of the main trifle, which she enforces with the proper inclination of head and body, and with the most expressive gesticulations of the fan, modestly confessing every now and then, by way of parenthesis, that possibly it may be thought presumption in a woman to talk at all upon those matters. In the meantime, her unhappy hearer stifles a thousand gapes, assents universally to whatever she says, in hopes of shortening the conversation, and carefully watches the first favorable opportunity, which any motion makes in the company gives him, of making his escape from this excellent solid understanding. Thus deserted, but not discouraged, she takes the whole company in their turns, and has, for every one, a whisper of equal importance."

Goldsmith makes his arguments more convincing with the description of a second misguided creature.

(2)

"Canidia, withered by age, and shattered by infirmities, totters under the load of her misplaced

(1) Essays Prior ed. vol. I p349

(2) " " " " I p350



that the last night's episode was no other than my cousin  
vanessa, four years older than myself, and I shall be  
always two the better of next November."

The woman who takes herself too seriously

is the subject of Holman's "Vanessa" in my essay in  
which he states his conviction that woman's place is

in the home.

(1)

"Vanessa, the most frivolous woman in  
the world, comes for her part for being so  
frivolous. She despises the serious and obse-  
rvice of a mind company; she will be serious, that  
she will; and emphatically that she  
likes reason and good sense; by Vanessa's nature, she  
never rises in the general conversation, but stays  
out some one else, whom she thinks worthy of her good  
sense, and in a half voice, of this voice, dis-  
tinctly replies in the ear, well, particularly  
upon the most trifling circumstances of the main  
thing, which she mixes with the proper inaction  
of head and body, and with the most expressive ges-  
tures of the face, making conversation every now and  
then, by way of parenthesis, that possibly it may be  
thought peculiar in a woman to talk at all upon those  
things. In the meantime, her whimsy never ceases  
a thousand times, seems universally to whatever she  
says, in order to excite the conversation, and  
especially to make the most favorable opportunity  
which any action offers for the conversation, of  
making the subject of the conversation solid and un-  
derstandable. She has been observed, she takes the whole  
company in their conversation, and every one, a  
whisper of equal importance."

Holman's takes the arguments more

convincingly with the description of a second misadventure

episode.

(2)

"Vanessa, withered by age, and shattered  
by affliction, looks rather the kind of her misplaced

(1) Essays, vol. 1, p. 100  
(2) Essays, vol. 1, p. 100

ornaments; and her dress varies according to the freshest advices from Paris, instead of conforming itself (as it ought) to the direction of her undertaker. Her mind, as weak as her body, is absurdly adorned; she talks politics and metaphysics, mangles the terms of each, and if there be sense in either, most infallibly puzzles it; adding intricacy to politics and darkness to mysteries, equally ridiculous in this world and the next."

The Chinese philosopher sees no beauty in English ladies, particularly when they are made up.  
(1)

"Yet uncivil as nature has been, they seem resolved to outdo her in unkindness; they use white powder, blue powder, and black powder for their hair, and a red powder for the face on some particular occasions. They like to have the face of various colors, as among the Tartars of Koreke, frequently sticking on, with spittle, little black patches on every part of it, except on the tip of the nose, which I have never seen with a patch."

Goldsmith believes that people were as vain in ancient times. It is only the customs that change.

(2)  
"It is the same vanity, that formerly stained our ladies' cheeks and necks with woad, and now paints them with carmine. Your ancient Briton formerly powdered his hair with red earth, like brick-dust, in order to appear frightful; your modern Briton cuts his hair on the crown, and plasters it with hog's lard and flour; and this to make him look killing."

The vanities of men as well as those of women are targets for Goldsmith's ridicule notwithstanding the fact that he himself was guilty of an inordinate love of fine clothing.

(1) Citizen of the World Prior ed. vol. II p24

(2) Essays Prior ed. vol I pl95



ownment; and not dress varied according to the  
fashion; and from it, it is evident of conformity  
itself (as it ought) to the direction of the  
color. For a kind, as with its propriety, it is usually  
adorned; and with a polished and polished, and  
the dress of each, and it there be some in color,  
most infinitely various; adding instance to instance  
and changes to changes, usually variations in the  
world and the next."

The Chinese philosopher does not deny

in English ladies, particularly when they are made up.

(1)  
"I have never seen a woman who does not, they  
seem resolved to set a new fashion; they use  
white powder, blue powder, and black powder for their  
hair, and a red powder for the face; and now particular  
note, they like to have the face of various  
colors, as orange, the cheeks of orange, the eyes  
blackish, or, with white, little black patches on  
every part of it, except on the tip of the nose, which  
I have never seen with a patch."

Goldsmith collects that people were not

vain in ancient times. It is only the custom that

changes.

(2)  
"It is the same vanity, that formerly  
adorned our ladies' cheeks and necks with white, and  
now paints them with various colors. For ancient custom  
formerly powdered his hair with red earth, I've origi-  
nally, in order to appear frightful; your modern custom  
puts his hair on the crown, and I suppose it will be a  
land and flame; and this to make his look shining."

The vanity of men as well as those of

women are targets for Goldsmith's ridicule in his

satire; the fact that he himself was guilty of an

exaggerated love of fine clothing.

(1) Edition of the World, 1796, vol. 1, p. 104  
(2) Essays, 1796, vol. 1, p. 104

The Chinese philosopher finds huge wigs absurd.

(1)

"To make a fine gentleman, several trades are required, but chiefly a barber. You have undoubtedly heard of a Jewish champion, whose strength lay in his hair; one would think that the English were for placing all wisdom there: to appear wise, nothing is requisite here than for a man to borrow hair from the heads of all his neighbors, and clap it like a bush on his own: the distributors of law and physic stick on such quantities, that it is almost impossible, even in idea, to distinguish between the head and the hair."

Wigs with tails are even worse.

(2)

"----but, to make the picture more perfectly striking, conceive the tail of some beast, a greyhound's tail, or a pig's tail for instance, appended to the back of the head, and reaching down to that place where tails in other animals are generally seen to begin; thus betailed and bepowdered, the man of taste fancies he improves in beauty, dresses up his hard-featured face in smiles, and attempts to look hideously tender. Thus equipped, he is qualified to make love, and hopes for success, more from the powder on the outside of his head, than the sentiments within."

The following passage is a most amusing description of the ludicrous beau of the eighteenth century whose sole ambition in life is to please the ladies.

(3)

"A fellow of this kind employs three hours every morning in dressing his hair. He is a professed admirer, not of any particular lady, but of the whole sex. He is to suppose every lady has caught cold every night, which gives him an opportunity of calling to see how she does the next morning. He is

(1) Citizen of the World Prior ed. p 23

(2) " " " " " " vol. II p 23

(3) " " " " " " II p 44





upon all occasions to show himself in very great pain for the ladies; if a lady drop even a pin, he is to fly in order to present it. He never speaks to a lady without advancing his mouth to her ear, by which he frequently addresses more senses than one. Upon proper occasions he looks excessively tender. This is performed by laying his hand upon his heart, shutting his eyes and showing his teeth. He is excessively fond of dancing a minuet with the ladies, by which is only meant walking round the floor eight or ten times with his hat on, affecting great gravity, and sometimes looking tenderly on his partner. He never affronts any man himself, and never resents an affront from another. He has an infinite variety of small talk upon all occasions, and laughs when he has nothing more to say. Such is the killing creature who prostrates himself to the sex till he has undone them; all whose submissions are the effects of design, and who to please the ladies almost becomes himself a lady."

The success which these gentlemen had with the ladies is ridiculed in the following letter which one of their victims writes to her friend.

(1)

"He waited on mamma and me the next morning to know how we got home: you must know the insidious devil makes love to us both. Rap went the footman at the door; bounce went my heart: I thought he would have rattled the house down. Chariot drove up to the window, with his footmen in the prettiest liveries: he has infinite taste, that is flat. Mamma has spent all the morning at her head; but for my part, I was in an undress to receive him; quite easy, mind that; no way disturbed at his approach: mamma pretended to be as degagee as I, and yet I saw her blush in spite of her. Positively he is a most killing devil! We did nothing but laugh all the time he staid with us; I never heard so many very good things before: at first he mistook mamma for my sister; at which she laughed: then he mistook my natural complexion for paint; at which I laughed; and then he showed us a picture in the lid of his snuff-box, at which we all laughed. He plays picquet so very ill, and is so very fond of cards, and loses with such a grace, that



you all occasions for now I shall in very much the  
same manner; I shall drop every now and then a  
line in order to assist it. I shall never speak to a  
body without expressing his worth to her ear, by which  
her gently address some subject than one. I shall  
never speak to her except in a friendly manner. I shall  
be pleased to find her hand with her heart, smiling  
his eyes and knowing his heart. He is especially fond  
of a kind of a hand with the ladies, by which in only  
a moment he would be the object of her eyes with  
his eye an affection great gravity, and sometimes  
looking kindly on his partner. He never allows  
any man to be, and never resents an attack from  
another. He has an infinite variety of small talk  
now all occasions, and I shall when he has nothing more  
to say. Such is the killing creature who possesses  
himself to the sex with his whole heart; all  
those who are the object of his love, and who  
to please the ladies almost become his life.

The sweetest thing I have ever known had

with the ladies is illustrated in the following letter

which one of their victims writes to her friend.

(1)  
"He waited on women and on the next  
morning to know how we got home; you must have seen  
him at the door; he makes love to us both. He went to  
look at the door; he made me my heart; I thought  
he would have raised the house down. He said there  
up to the window, with his footmen in the present  
living; he has infinite taste, that is like. I shall  
have great all the women at her feet; but for my part,  
I was in an attitude to receive him; make easy, with  
that; so my husband at his approach; he was surprised  
to see at his house as I, and yet I saw him in the  
of her. I shall be in a most killing devil; he  
did not know me in all the time he was with us;  
I never heard so many very good things before; at  
first he looked mean for my sister; he said she  
was not; then he looked at my sister's complexion for  
a moment; at which I laughed; and then he showed us a  
picture in the lid of his snuff-box, so when we all  
laughed. He plays about so very well, and is so  
very fond of cards, and does with me a game, that







of a flea. Now the polypus comes to breakfast upon a worm; now it is kept up to see how long it will live without eating; now it is turned inside outward; and now it sickens and dies. Thus they proceed, laborious in trifles, constant in experiment, without one single abstraction, by which alone knowledge may be properly said to increase; till at last their ideas, ever employed upon minute things, contract to the size to the diminutive object, and a single mite shall fill the whole mind's capacity."

The tiresome conceit of some authors of travel books comes in for ridicule.

(1)

"With what pleasure, for instance, do some read of a traveller in Egypt measuring a fallen column with his cane, and finding it exactly five feet nine inches long; of his creeping through the mouth of a catacomb, and coming out by a different hole from that he entered; of his stealing the finger of an antique statue, in spite of the janizary that watched him; or his adding a new conjecture to the hundred and fourteen conjectures already published, upon the names of Osiris and Isis."

The most subtle ridicule of personal vanity is to be found in "The Vicar of Wakefield."

In a conversation between the two pretended ladies in this story, Goldsmith ridicules the curiosity which people have concerning the trifling affairs of the great.

(2)

"'All that I know of the matter,' cried Miss Skeggs, 'is this, that it may be true, or it may not be true: but this I can assure your Ladyship, that the whole rout was in amaze; his Lordship turned all manners of colors, my Lady fell into a swoon, but Sir Tomkyn, drawing his sword, swore he was hers to the last drop of his blood.'

(1) Citizen of the World Prior ed. vol. II p 481

(2) Vicar of Wakefield Prior ed. vol III p 68





' Well,' replied our Peeress, 'this I can say, that the Duchess never told me a syllable of the matter, and I believe her Grace would keep nothing a secret from me. This you may depend upon as fact, that, the next morning, my Lord Duke cried out three times to his valet-de-chambre, Jernigan, Jernigan, Jernigan, bring me my garters.' "

The attempts of the Vicar's daughters to appear above their circumstances are treated with gentle humor. In this passage the Vicar deplores the efforts of the girls to compete with the great ladies from the town.

(1)

" Our windows again, as formerly, were filled with washes for the neck and face. The sun was dreaded as an enemy to the skin without doors, and the fire as a spoiler of the complexion within. My wife observed, that rising too early would hurt her daughters eyes, that working after dinner would redden their noses, and she convinced me that the hands never looked so white as when they did nothing. Instead therefore of finishing George's shirts, we now had them new modelling their old gauzes or flouishing upon catgut. The poor Miss Flamboroughs, their former gay companions, were cast off as mean acquaintance, and the whole conversation ran upon high life, and high-lived company, with pictures, taste, Shakespeare, and the musical glasses."

The Vicar is amusing in his vain but natural desire to impress his wife.

(2)

"Even in bed my wife kept up the usual theme: '-----Tell me, my dear, don't you think I did for my children there?' 'Ay,' returned I, not knowing well what to think of the matter, 'heaven grant they may be both the better for it this day three months!' This was one of those observations I usually made to impress my wife with an opinion of my sagacity; for if

(1) Vicar of Wakefield Prior ed. vol. III p 62

(2) " " " " " " " III p 72





the girls succeeded, then it was a pious wish fulfilled; but if any thing unfortunate ensued, then it might be looked upon as a prophecy."

In spite of Goldsmith's disgust for the way in which Beau Nash prostrated himself before wealth and social position, he was greatly entertained by the personal vanities of this man. He writes humorously of the changing customs of making love, and of the proficiency of Nash, the beau of three generations, in mastering each fashion.

(1)

"The manner in which gentlemen managed their amours in these different ages of fashion, was not more different than their periwigs. The lover in the reign of King Charles was solemn, majestic and formal. He visited his mistress in state; languished for the favor, kneeled when he toasted his goddess, walked with solemnity, performed the most trifling things with decorum, and even took snuff with a flourish. The beau of the latter part of queen Anne's reign was disgusted with so much formality; he was pert, smart and lively; his billets-doux were written in a quite different style from that of his antiquated predecessor; he was ever laughing at his own ridiculous situation; till at last, he persuaded the lady to become as ridiculous as himself. The beau of the third age, in which Nash died, was still more extraordinary than either; his whole secret in intrigue consisted in perfect indifference. The only way to make love now, I have heard Nash say, was to take no manner of notice of the lady; which method was found the surest way to secure her affections."

Irony which leaves its victim in doubt as to whether or not he is being laughed at plays a small part in the humor of Goldsmith who was much too good-natured to use it. One of the very few

(1) Life of Richard Nash Prior ed. vol. III p 303



the child answered, "I am a girl, and I am not  
but if my father were dead, then I might be  
looked upon as a princess."

In spite of Goldsmith's silence, the

way in which Peter had presented himself before  
her and social position, he was greatly embarrassed  
by the personal qualities of this man. He writes  
numerously of the changing aspects of feeling love, and  
of the prevalence of such, the dawn of those gener-  
ations, in masterful speech. London.

(1)

"The manner in which Goldsmith managed  
their money in these different ways of London, was  
not more different than their politics. The lover in  
the midst of his studies was not only, artistic and  
formal. He visited the theatre in the most elaborate  
for the day, dressed when he reached his room, and  
waited with solemnity, and even took small things  
things with decorum, and even took small things  
the heart of the latter part of Goldsmith's life was  
also filled with so much formality; he was not, as  
and lively; his brilliant and witty nature was quite  
different at the time of his earliest studies.  
and he was ever finding as to his own position, and  
thing; all at last, he returned to the life he had  
himself as himself. The dawn of the time, which  
which, and which, was still more extraordinary than  
either; his whole career in London was not in  
any set indifference. The only way to make love now,  
I have heard, was to take the name of a friend  
of the lady; which was found the easiest way  
to escape her attentions."

Henry John leaves his victim in honor

as to whether or not he is being laughed at plays  
a small part in the humor of Goldsmith who was much  
too concerned to live it. One of the very few  
(1) also of Thomas Nash, London, Vol. III, p. 308

ironical passages in his works is found in the following quotation in which Beau Nash talks of the ladies.

(1)

"Wit, flattery, and fine clothes, he used to say, were enough to debauch a nunnery. But my fair readers of the present day are exempt from this scandal; and it is no matter now, what he said of their grandmothers. "

The vanity of Nash who considered himself a wit is ridiculed.

(2)

" Of all the jests recorded of him, I scarcely find one that is not marked with petulance: he said whatever came uppermost, and in the number of his remarks it might naturally be expected that some were worth repeating; he threw often, and sometimes had a lucky cast. In a life of almost ninety years, spent in the very point of public view, it is not strange that five of six sprightly things of his have been collected, particularly as he took every opportunity of repeating them himself. His usual way, when he thought he had said any thing clever, was to strengthen it with an oath, and to make up its want of sentiment by assersversation and grimace."

The ridiculous nature of the elegies for Beau Nash amused Goldsmith.

(3)

" It was natural to expect that the death of a person so long in the eye of the public must have produced a desire in several to delineate his character, or deplore his loss. He was scarcely dead, when the public papers were filled with elegies, groans, and characters; and before he was buried there were epitaphs ready-made to inscribe on his stone. I remember one of those character writers, and a very grave one, too, after observing, alas! that Richard Nash, Esq. was no more, went on to assure us, that he was 'sagacious, debonair, and comode;' and concluded with gravely declaring, that 'impotent posterity would in vain fumble to produce his fellow.' Another,

(1) Life of Richard Nash Prior ed. vol III p 303

(2) " " " " " " " " III p 335

(3) " " " " " " " " III p 346





equally sorrowful, gave us to know, 'that he was indeed a man;' an assertion which I fancy none will be so hardy as to contradict. But the merriest of all the lamentations made upon this occasion was that in which he was called 'a constellation of the heavenly sphere.' "

In his ridicule of personal vanity Goldsmith did not exempt himself. In this case humor is directed against himself because of his chagrin that 'The Bee' was not more popular.

(1)

" I was once induced to show my indignation against the public, by discontinuing my endeavors to please; and was bravely resolved, like Raleigh, to vex them by burning my manuscript in a passion. Upon recollection, however, I considered what set or body of people would be displeased at my rashness. The sun, after so bad an accident, might shine next morning as bright as usual; men might laugh and sing the next day, and transact business as before, and not a single creature feel any regret but myself. "

In the same vein he calls upon posterity for vindication.

(2)

"In short, I am resolved to write on, if it were only to spite them. If the present generation will not hear my voice, hearken, O posterity! to you I call, and from you I expect redress! What rapture will it not give to have the Scaligers, Daciers, and Warburtons of future times commenting with admiration upon every line I now write, working away those ignorant creatures who offer to arraign my merit, with all the virulence of learned reproach. Ay, my friends, let them feel it: call names, never spare them; they deserve it all, and ten times more. I have been told of a critic, who was crucified at the command of another to the reputation of Homer. That, no doubt, was more than poetical justice, and I shall be perfectly content if those who criticise

(1) The Bee Prior ed. vol. I p 67

(2) " " " " " I p 68-69





me are only clapped in the pillory, kept fifteen days upon bread and water, and obliged to run the gantlope through Paternoster-row. The truth is, I can expect happiness from posterity either way. If I write ill, happy in being forgotten; if well, happy in being remembered with respect. "

### Provincialism of the English

Goldsmith considered Englishmen of all classes too prone to find nothing to praise outside their own country. He discusses this subject in a serious essay, "On National Prejudices", in which he expresses his liking for the title 'citizen of the world.' Throughout his works he finds occasion frequently to ridicule the provincial attitude of his countrymen.

In an early issue of "The Bee," he describes his meditations in a moment of despondency when he decided to cater to the popular taste.

(1)

"I was once determined to throw off all connections with taste, and fairly address my countrymen in the same engaging style and manner with other periodical pamphlets, much more in vogue than probably mine shall ever be. To effect this, I had thoughts of changing the title into that of the "Royal Bee," the "Antigallican Bee", or the "Bee's Magazine." I had laid in a proper stock of popular topics, such as encomiums on the king of Prussia, invectives against the queen of Hungary and the French, the necessity of a militia, our undoubted sovereignty of the seas, reflections upon the present state of affairs, a dissertation upon liberty, some seasonable thoughts upon the intended bridge of Blackfriars, and an address to Britons."

(1) The Bee Prior ed. vol. I p70





Goldsmith makes his satirical comments most amusing and effective by the frequent use of typical characters such as the old writer and Jack Reptile in the following quotations. With the exception of the Man in Black and Beau Tibbs these characters in the Essays never appear a second time but they are clearly outlined and never fail to be thoroughly consistent in their absurdities.

The idea of the common people as to the superiority of the English over the French is found in the conversation of an old waiter who served his customers with politics as well as punch.

(1)

"Paris may be about two hundred miles off; it is half as big as London; there they make your lace and such sort of stuff; it is a very pretty place to be sure, and would afford our battalions of guards very pretty picking. The walls cannot stand a siege of four-and-twenty hours; it is nothing but sweeping up through the kingdom and taking Lewis the Small by the beard. Lord, Sir, they could never stand it; for how can French fellows fight when they are drunk with punch? If I were Secretary of State, may this be my poison, but I would show them a trick. Only sail up forty men of war to their very gates, and where would they be then?' The whole company, who were every bit as sanguine as he, acquiesced in the practice and vigor of his measures; the French monarch was deposed, the English standard was erected on the Bastille, and every person present seemed to enjoy the plunder by anticipation."

After an English victory another man discusses the situation in the street with equal logic.

(2)

"If the French had got the better

(1) Essays Prior ed. vol. I p 178

(2) " " " " I p 179





what would have become of our property? If Mounseers in wooden shoes come among us, what would become of the gentle craft, what would become of the nation, when perhaps Madame Pompadour herself might have shoes scooped out of an old pear tree;"

As a result of the extensiveness of his observations and the superior quality of his creative imagination Goldsmith writes very convincingly of all kinds of men. He knows the ignorant, bombastic, emotionalism which takes the place of reason in governing the speech and actions of men like Jack Reptile who considers himself patriotic by abusing the French.

(1)

"Jack Reptile is a professed Anti-gallican; he gets drunk with French wine three times a week. To convince the world of his detestation of Monsieur Soupmaigre, he assures the company he has once, when he was young, boxed three Frenchmen, 'one down t'other come on,' and beat them all; he wonders how French scoundrels can live who eat nothing but salads and frogs the year round. Jack hates every thing that is French, except their wine, and has been known to quarrel with some of his countrymen for wearing a bag-wig."

Men of Jack's temper enjoy and encourage war.

(2)

"War gives him no uneasiness; he sits and soaks in profound security; the distresses, the calamities of mankind, neither interrupt his tranquillity, nor lessen his draught; the miseries of his fellow-creatures, like the pictures of a battle, serve rather to excite pleasure than pain. Ten thousand fallen on one field make a curious article in the gazette. Hundreds sunk to the bottom by one broadside,

(1) Essays Prior ed. vol. I p 335

(2) " " " " I p 335





furnish out the topic of the day and zest his coffee; the very tempest guides him to his harbor.

A man in a coffee-house expresses his opinion of foreigners.

(1)

"---one of the gentlemen, cocking his hat, and assuming such an air of importance as if he had possessed all the merit of the English nation in his own person, declared that the Dutch were a parcel of avaricious wretches; the French a set of Flattering sycophants; that the Germans were drunken sots, and beastly gluttons; and the Spaniards proud, haughty, and surly tyrants: but that in bravery, generosity, clemency, and in every other virtue, the English excelled all the world."

#### Quack doctors

Since Goldsmith studied medicine before he began to write, it is not extraordinary that he should find many incongruities in this field. By the subtle use of understatement he ridicules the remarkable confidence of quack doctors. This is an example of Goldsmith's ability to find humor in a subject which would not ordinarily be considered humorous.

(1) Citizen of the World Prior ed. vol. II p 39



turning out the lights of the day and away his college;  
the very language which he has heard.

A man in a college-house expresses his

admiration of the language.

(1)

"--one of the greatest, possibly the  
last, who ever lived, and an art of language as it is  
now possessed all the world of the English nation in  
his own person, a talent that the world were a great  
of a nation and a great; the French a set of flatterers  
of a nation; and the Germans were a nation of  
deserters; and the English a people of  
and truly tyrants; but that in a nation, generous  
element, and in every other virtue, the English  
excelled all the world."

#### Black doctors

Since Coleridge's studied medicine

before he began to write, it is not extraordinary  
that he should find many indications in this field.  
By the study of the nature of the disease the  
remarkable confidence of these doctors, that is in  
the study of the nature of the disease, that is in  
the study of the nature of the disease, that is in  
the study of the nature of the disease, that is in

(1) Coleridge, of the World, vol. 1, p. 39











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(1)

"The first upon the list of glory  
is Doctor Richard Rock F. U. N. This great man,  
short of stature, is fat, and waddles as he walks.  
He always wears a white three-tailed wig nicely  
combed, and frizzed upon each cheek; sometimes he  
carries a cane, but a hat never. It is indeed very  
remarkable, that this extraordinary personage should  
never wear a hat, but so it is, he never wears a hat.  
He is usually drawn at the top of his own bills,  
sitting in his arm-chair, holding a little bottle  
between his finger and thumb, and surrounded with  
rotten teeth, nippers, pills, packets, and gallipots.  
No man can promise fairer nor better than he; for,  
as he observes, 'Be your disorder never so far gone,  
be under no uneasiness, make yourself quite easy;  
I can cure you.' "

The humor of the following passage in which the Chinese philosopher tells of the disagreement between two leading quacks is more obvious than that found in most of Goldsmith's works. It is saved from being commonplace by the interpolation of the parenthetical statement concerning the great wit of the combatants.

(2)

"And yet the great have their foibles as well as the little. I am almost ashamed to mention it: let the foibles of the great rest in peace. Yet I must impart the whole to my friend. These two great men are actually now at variance: yes, my dear Fum Hoam, by the head of our grandfather, they are now at variance like mere men, mere common mortals. The champion Rock advises the world to beware of bog-trotting quacks, while Franks retorts the wit and sarcasm (for they have both a world of wit) by fixing on his rival the odious appellation of Dumplin Dick. He calls the serious Doctor Rock, Dumplin Dick. What a pity, ye powers, that the learned, who were born mutually to assist in enlightening the

(1) Citizen of the World Prior ed. vol. II p 284

(20) " " " " " " " II p 285





the world, should thus differ among themselves, and make even the profession ridiculous! Sure the world is wide enough, at least, for two great personages to figure in: men of science should leave controversy to the little world below them; and then we might see Rock and Franks walking together hand-in-hand, smiling onward to immortality."

### Ministers and religion

This subject shows again how much more effective Goldsmith is when he writes in a humorous vein than when he treats the subject seriously. In  
(1)  
a serious essay "On the English Clergy and Popular Preachers," he deplores the lack of respect shown the clergy of his time and more particularly the failure of the clergy to command respect. This essay is most sincere, but it deals with generalities and it does not bring the truth to us as forcefully as does the humorous treatment of the same theme in  
(2)  
"A Visitation Dinner Described," parts of which are quoted in the following section.

Goldsmith's satire of religion seems mild when compared to Swift's "A Tale of a Tub," and his ridicule of the Puritans does not compare with the more stinging raillery of Butler's "Hudibras."

Through the eyes of the Chinese philosopher Goldsmith ridicules the visitation dinner

(1) Essays - Prior ed. vol I p 339

(2) Citizen of the World Prior ed. vol II p 241



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which has taken the place of visits of inspection by the principal priests to their subordinates.

(1)

" At present, therefore, every head of the church, instead of going about to visit his priests, is satisfied if his priests come in a body once a year to visit him; by this means the duty of half a year is dispatched in a day. When assembled, he asks each in his turn how they have behaved, and are liked; upon which, those who have neglected their duty, or are disagreeable to their congregation, no doubt accuse themselves, and tell him all their faults; for which he reprimands them most severely."

With characteristic optimism the Chinese philosopher looks forward with pleasure to the visitation dinner.

(2)

" The thoughts of being introduced into a company of philosophers and learned men (for such I conceived them) gave me no small pleasure. I expected our entertainment would resemble those sentimental banquets so finely described by Xenophon and Plato: I was hoping some Socrates would be brought in from the door, in order to harangue upon divine love; but as for eating and drinking, I had prepared myself to be disappointed in that particular. "

The company assemble and the Chinese guest is still ignorant of the real purpose of the meeting.

(3)

" Upon being introduced, I confess I found no great signs of mortification in the faces or persons of the company. However, I imputed their florid look to temperance, and their corpulency to a sedentary way of living. I saw several preparations indeed for dinner, but none for philosophy. The company seemed to gaze upon the table with silent expectation; but this I easily excused. Men of wisdom,

- (1) Citizen of the World Prior ed. vol II p 241  
 (2) " " " " " " " II p 242  
 (3) " " " " " " " II p 242

















for the enthusiast's being an enemy to laughter; namely his being himself so proper an object of ridicule."

Goldsmith ridicules the tendency of the clergy to flatter the great.

(1) " I would constitute professed flatterers here, as in several courts in India.--- At every sentence when the monarch pauses, and smiles at what he has been saying, the karamatman, as this officer is called, is to take it for granted, that his majesty has said a good thing. Upon which he cries out 'karamat' karamat' a miracle, a miracle,' and throws up his hands and his eyes in ecstasy. This is echoed by the courtiers around, while the emperor sits all this time in sullen satisfaction, enjoying the triumph of his joke, or studying a new repartee.

I would have such an officer placed at every great man's table in England. By frequent practice, he might soon turn out pleasing to his patron, no way troublesome to himself, and might prevent the nauseous attempts of many more ignorant pretenders. The clergy here I am convinced, would relish this proposal. It would provide places for several of them. And, indeed, by some of their late productions, many appeared to have qualified themselves as candidates for this office already."

In arguing against the idea that old times were best, Mrs. Quickly exposes the licentiousness of the monastery that took the place of her tavern.

(2)  
" My body was no sooner laid in the dust, than the prior and several of his convent came to purify the tavern from the pollutions with which they said I had filled it. Masses were said in every room, relics were exposed upon every piece of furniture, and the whole house washed with a deluge of holy water. My habitation was soon converted into a monastery: instead of customers now applying for sack and sugar, my rooms were crowded with images,

(1) Citizen of the World Prior ed. vol. II p 436

(2) Essays Prior ed. vol. I p 195





relics, saints, whores, and friars. Instead of being a scene of occasional debauchery, it was now filled with continual lewdness. The prior led the fashion, and the whole convent imitated his pious example. Matrons came hither to confess their sins, and to commit new. Virgins came hither who seldom went virgins away. "

### Marriage

Some of his biographers feel that Goldsmith's occasional moods of despondency were due in part to the fact that during most of his life he was a solitary figure working alone in London. He was estranged from his mother and although he wrote devoted letters to other members of his family he never returned to Ireland after he began his career as a writer. His future well wishers feel he should have married. DeQuincey, however, is not of this opinion. On the contrary, he thinks Goldsmith was immune from suffering for two reasons, first, because he had a constitutional gaiety of heart, and second, (1) because he never married. Says DeQuincey, "Wife and children he had not. They it is that being a man's chief blessing, create also for him the deadliest of his anxieties, that stuff his pillow with thorns, that surround his daily path with snares."

(1) DeQuincey, Thomas - Oliver Goldsmith P. 291











(1)

"To confess in friendship, if I were an Englishman, I fancy I should be an old bachelor myself; I should never find courage to run through all the adventures prescribed by the law. I could submit to court my mistress herself upon reasonable terms; but to court her father, her mother, and a long tribe of cousins, aunts, and relations, and then stand the butt of a whole country church; I would as soon turn tail and make love to her grandmother."

He deplores the fact that mercenary marriages are frequent.

(2)

"----when a couple are now to be married, mutual love, or a union of minds, is the last and most trifling consideration. If their goods and chattels can be brought to unite, their sympathetic souls are ever ready to guarantee the treaty. The gentleman's mortgaged lawn becomes enamored of the lady's grove; the match is struck up, and both parties are piously in love - according to act of parliament."

The marriage act is ridiculed.

(3)

"A lady's whole cargo of smiles, sighs, and whispers, is declared utterly contraband, till she arrives in the warm latitudes of twenty-two, where commodities of this nature are too often found to decay. She is then permitted to dimple and smile, when the dimples and smiles begin to forsake her; and, when perhaps grown ugly, is charitably intrusted with an unlimited use of her charms. Her lovers, however, by this time have forsaken her:"

Mercenary motives plus the marriage act have bought about a sad state of affairs in the institution of marriage.

(4)

"In short, turn even to England, do not I see there the beautiful part of the sex neglected; and none now marrying or making love, but old men

- |      |         |    |     |       |       |     |      |    |   |     |
|------|---------|----|-----|-------|-------|-----|------|----|---|-----|
| (1)  | Citizen | of | the | World | Prior | ed. | vol. | II | p | 304 |
| (20) | "       | "  | "   | "     | "     | "   | "    | II | p | 451 |
| (3)  | "       | "  | "   | "     | "     | "   | "    | II | p | 451 |
| (3)  | "       | "  | "   | "     | "     | "   | "    | II | p | 460 |





and old women that have saved money? Do not I see beauty from fifteen to twenty-one, rendered null and void to all intents and purposes; and those six precious years of womanhood, put under a statute of virginity? What! Shall I call that rancid passion love, which passes between an old bachelor of fifty-six, and a widow-lady of forty-nine? Never! never!"

The Chinese philosopher's opinion of a bachelor is the most abusive passage in the Letters.

(1)

"I behold an old bachelor in the most contemptible light, as an animal that lives upon the common stock without contributing his share: he is a beast of prey, and the law should make use of as many stratagems, and as much force, to drive the reluctant savage into the toils, as the Indians when they hunt the rhinoceros. The mob should be permitted to halloo after him; boys might play tricks on him with impunity; every well-bred company should laugh at him; and if, when turned of sixty, he offered to make love, his mistress might spit in his face, or, what would be perhaps a greater punishment, should fairly grant the favor."

Old maids are equally ridiculous.

Poor Sophronia was another of those ladies, affecting learning, whom Goldsmith despised.

(2)

"But Sophronia, the sagacious Sophronia, how shall I mention her? She was taught to love Greek, and hate the men from her very infancy: she has rejected fine gentlemen because they were not pedants, and pedants because they were not fine gentlemen; her exquisite sensibility has taught her to discover every fault in every lover, and her inflexible justice has prevented her pardoning them: thus she rejected several offers, till the wrinkles of age had overtaken her; and now, without one good feature in her face she talks incessantly of the beauties of the mind."

(1) Citizen of the World Prior ed. vol II p 119

(2)            II        II        II        II            II        II        II        III p 122





### Incongruities in Character

Goldsmith rises to his greatest height in humor in his characters. Concerning the merit of humorous characters Hazlitt says: <sup>(1)</sup> "There is nothing more powerfully humorous than what is called keeping in comic character---The deep feeling of character strengthens the sense of the ludicrous. Keeping in comic character is consistency in absurdity; a determined and laudable attachment to the incongruous and singular."

The humor of character is the most effective kind of humor because it is sustained and may be carried through an entire book. It does not depend upon the element of surprise. On the contrary, after being made familiar with the eccentricities of the character, the reader gets much satisfaction in being able to anticipate the reactions of that character in various circumstances.

Goldsmith does not treat his humorous characters in a satirical fashion, but according to the method of real humor which has a sympathetic understanding for all the foibles of men.

Stephen Leacock has a word to say about <sup>(2)</sup> what makes the comic character funny. "'Funny' characters

(1) Hazlitt, William-Lectures on the English Comic Writers p 11

(2) Leacock, Stephen-Humor, Its Theory and Technique p 107



Introduction to the Study of Character

Goldsmith rises to his greatest height in  
humor in his characters. "Conceiving the spirit of humor-  
(1)  
and character," Hamlet says: "There is nothing more  
powerfully impressive than what is as if it were in comic  
character--the deep feeling of character, the sense of the  
sense of the ridiculous. Feeling in comic character is  
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effective kind of humor because it is sustained and may  
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(1) Hamlet, William-Scott on the English Comic  
Writers p. 11

(2) Leacock, Stephen-Funny, Its Theory and Technique p. 107

are made so by presenting, whether we are conscious of it or not, the same destructive contrasts and incongruities that are the basis of humor itself." In Beau Tibbs there is a contrast between vanity of social ambition and the actual poverty of the man. In the Vicar of Wakefield the contrast is between the innocent simplicity of the Vicar and the wickedness of the world. Croaker is humorous because of the incongruity of his groundless fears in the face of his real security. In Lofty there is a contrast between pretended importance and actual inconsequence.

#### Beau Tibbs

Beau Tibbs is one of those really comic characters who succeed in keeping consistent in their absurdity. The character of the Beau is sketched so perfectly that one feels about him as did Mr. Priestly of Jane Austin's Mr. Collins. (1) "Although we feel that we know what he will do and say next, yet he always goes beyond our expectations as absurd people in real life do; we know the kind of thing he will say, yet we could not say it for him (as we could with a lesser comic character), for his absurdity is always a little in advance of what we could possibly imagine."

(1) Priestly, J. B.-The English Comic Characters p 160



are made so by presenting, whether we are conscious of it or not, the as we destructive contrasts and incongruities that are the basis of humor itself. In these things there is a contrast between vanity of social ambition and the actual poverty of the man. In the view of the world the contrast is between the conceit simplicity of the vision and the wickedness of the world. Greater is an ironic because of the incongruity of his groundless terms in the face of his real security. In fact there is a contrast between pretended importance and actual inconsequence.

#### Benjamin Tibbs

Benjamin Tibbs is one of those really comic characters who succeed in keeping consistent in their absurdity. The character of the Tibbs is affected so perfectly that one feels about him as did Mr. (1) Tibbs of the Austin's Mr. Collins. "Although we feel that we know what he will do and say next, yet he always goes beyond our expectations as absurd people in real life do; we know the kind of thing he will say, yet we could not say it for him (as we could with a lesser comic character). For his absurdity is always a little in advance of what we could possibly imagine." (1) Tibbs, J. L. - The English Comic Characters p. 150

Goldsmith intended to make Beau Tibbs and his wife examples of what people may resolve into who live only to flatter and to be noticed by the great. It is a tribute to Goldsmith's power as a genuine humorist that with all their silliness there is something likeable about this couple. Goldsmith's manner of introducing Beau Tibbs arouses the reader's curiosity. This same method is used in the introduction of several of the humorous characters in the plays.

(1)

"We had gone thus deliberately forward for some time, when, stopping on a sudden, my friend caught me by the elbow, and led me out of the public walk. I could perceive by the quickness of his pace, and by his frequently looking behind, that he was attempting to avoid somebody who followed; we now turned to the right, then to the left; as we went forward he still went faster, but in vain; the person whom he attempted to escape hunted us through every doubling, and gained upon us each moment; so that at last we fairly stood still, resolving to face what we could not avoid."

The humorous description of Tibb's appearance adds much to an appreciation of his character.

(2)

"---his hat was pinched up with peculiar smartness; his looks were pale, thin, and sharp; round his neck he wore a broad black ribbon, and in his bosom a buckle studded with glass; his coat was trimmed with tarnished twist; he wore by his side a sword with a black hilt, and his stockings of silk, though newly washed were grown yellow by long service."

(1) Citizen of the World Prior ed. vol II p 227

(2) " " " " " " " II p 228



Goldsmith intended to make such things

and his life a series of what people may call "episodes"

which live only in the past and to be noticed by the

past. It is a tribute to Goldsmith's power as a

novelistic material that with all their silliness there

is something like about this episode. Goldsmith's

method of introducing the episodes through the reader's

eyesight. This same method is used in the introduction

of several of the numerous episodes in the novel.

(1)

"The first thing Goldsmith did in the novel

for some time, when, standing on a street, he looked

about him as if he were looking for a man of the name

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Tibbs pretends to scorn flattery and association with the great.

(1)

" 'Psha, psha, Will," cried the figure, 'no more of that if you love me; you know I hate flattery, on my soul I do; and yet, to be sure, an intimacy with the great will improve one's appearance, and a course of venison will fatten; and yet, faith, I despise the great as much as you do; but there are a great many damn'd honest fellows among them; and we must not quarrel with one half, because the other wants breeding. If they were all such as my lord Mudler, one of the most good-natured creatures that ever squeezed a lemon, I should myself be among the number of their admirers."

Tibb's rambling conversation is one of his most humorous characteristics. While recalling an imaginary bet of a thousand guineas, he remembers to ask for the loan of half-a-crown. His request for the loan for "a minute or two, or so, just til-" is one of the most perfectly characteristic speeches of this flighty little man.

(2)

" "We were a select party of us to dine at Lady Grogram's, an affected piece, but let it go no farther; a secret; well, there happened to be no asafoetida in the sauce to a turkey, upon which, says I, I'll hold a thousand guineas, and say done first, that-but dear Drybone, you are an honest creature, lend me half-a-crown for a minute or two, or so, just till-but harkee, ask me for it next time we meet, or it may be twenty to one but I forget to pay you." "

The dignified Chinese philosopher walks through the park with Tibbs in a state of self-conscious

(1) Citizen of the World Prior ed. vol. II p 228

(2) " " " " " " " " II p 229





trepidation.

(1)

"--- he bowed to several well-dressed peroons, who, by their manner of returning the compliment, appeared perfect strangers. At intervals he drew out a pocket-book, seeming to take memorandums before all the company, with much importance and assiduity. In this manner he led me through the length of the whole walk, fretting at his absurdities, and fancying myself laughed at not less than him by every spectator."

Tibbs smooths over unpleasant revelations made by his servant by further recourse to fiction.

(2)

"When we were got in, he welcomed me to his house with great ceremony, and turning to the old woman, asked where was her lady? 'Good troth,' replied she in a peculiar dialect, 'she's washing your twa shirts at the next door, because they have taken an oath against lending out the tub any longer.' 'My two shirts,' cries he in a tone that faltered with confusion, 'what does the idiot mean?' 'I ken what I mean weel enough,' replied the other; 'she's washing your twa shirts at the next door, because- ' 'Fire and fury! no more of thy stupid explanations,' cried he; 'go and inform her we have got company. Were that Scotch hag to be for ever in the family, she would never learn politeness, nor forget that absurd poisonous accent of hers, or testify the smallest specimen of breeding or high life; and yet it is very surprising too, as I had her from a parliament man, a friend of mine from the Highlands, one of the politest men in the world; but that's a secret.'"

Tibb's pretences make his poverty humorous.

(3)

"We waited some time for Mrs. Tibb's arrival, during which interval I had a full opportunity of surveying the chamber and all its furniture; which

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|-----|----------------------|-----------|---------|----------|
| (1) | Citizen of the World | Prior ed. | vol. II | p 231    |
| (2) | "                    | "         | "       | II p 232 |
| (3) | "                    | "         | "       | II p 233 |











borrowed another half-a-crown.

(1)

"Just, however, before the little beau took his leave he called me aside, and requested that I would change him a twenty pound bill; which as I was incapable of doing, he was contented with borrowing half-a-crown."

Beau Tibbs describes the intended coronation in typical fashion.

(2)

"All men are eloquent upon their favorite topic; and this seemed peculiarly adapted to the size and turn of his understanding. His whole mind was blazoned over with a variety of glittering images; coronets, escutcheons, lace, fringe, tassels, stones, bugles, and spun glass. 'Here,' cried he, 'Garter is to walk; and there Rouge Dragon marches with the escutcheons on his back. Here Cla riencieux moves forward; and there Blue Ma ntle disdains to be left behind; Here the Aldermen march two and two; and there the undaunted champion of England, no way terrified at the very numerous appearance of gentlemen and ladies, rides forward in complete armor, and, with an intrepid air, throws down his glove.' "

The Chinese philosopher refuses to pay twenty pounds just to be able to say that he had seen a coronation. Tibbs has his own solution to this problem.

(3)

"'Sir,' replied the man, 'you seem to be under a mistake; all that you can bring away is the pleasure of having to say, that you saw the coronation.' -- 'Blast me!' cries Tibbs, 'if that be all, there is no need of paying for that, since I am resolved to have that pleasure, whether I am there or no!'"

### The Vicar of Wakefield

The critics have much praise for

- |     |                      |                |          |
|-----|----------------------|----------------|----------|
| (1) | Citizen of the World | Prior ed. vol. | II p 401 |
| (2) | "                    | "              | II p 415 |
| (3) | "                    | "              | II p 418 |



between another half-grown.

(2)

"Just, however, before the little  
man took his leave he called to him, and requested  
that I would return him a twenty dollar bill; which as I  
was incapable of doing, he was contented with returning  
half-grown."

From this description the intended

correlation in typical fashion.

(3)

"All men are eloquent upon their  
favorite topics and this seemed especially so  
the time and turn of the conversation. His whole mind  
was directed over with a variety of alluring topics;  
conscience, conscience, fact, theory, justice, reason,  
law, and even glass. 'I have,' he said, 'never been so  
happy; and there have never been such with the  
eccentricities on his back. I have the pleasant  
feeling; and there is no other pleasure to be left  
behind; here the afternoon march two and two; and there  
the midnight procession of light, no way behind at  
the very moment of appearance of gentlemen and ladies,  
this forward in complete array, and with an intent to  
all, down the aisle.'"

The Chinese philosopher replies to

my twenty counts just to be able to say that he had

no more conversation. There was his own collection to this

proportion.

(4)

"His," replied the man, "had seen  
to be under a mistake; all that you can bring away is  
the pleasure of having to say, that you saw the con-  
versation. -- 'I had seen,' he said, 'it was all  
there; I had seen of seeing for what, since I had seen  
to have that pleasure, whether I am there or not.'"

### The Water of Knowledge

The Chinese have much to say for

II

- |     |                     |        |           |
|-----|---------------------|--------|-----------|
| (1) | Origin of the World | Vol. 1 | 11 p. 101 |
| (2) | "                   | "      | 11 p. 101 |
| (3) | "                   | "      | 11 p. 101 |
| (4) | "                   | "      | 11 p. 101 |

the masterly skill with which Goldsmith has drawn the character of the Vicar. Macaulay praises the early chapters of the book as having <sup>(1)</sup> "all the sweetness of pastoral poetry, together with all the vivacity of comedy."

Much of the humor in the character of the Vicar is of that variety which is very difficult to capture and define. It permeates the whole story to such an extent that one is at a loss to decide just where an individual example of it begins or leaves off. William Black has written an excellent description of the subtle quality of Goldsmith's humor in this book and of the unusual effect which this kind of humor has upon the reader. <sup>(2)</sup> "There is no insistence. There is no dragging you along by the collar; confronting you with certain figures; and compelling you to look at this and study that. The artist stands by you, and laughs in his quiet way; and you are laughing too, when suddenly you find the human beings have silently come into the void before you, and you know them for friends, and even after the vision has faded away, and the beautiful light and color and glory of romance-land have vanished you cannot forget them. They have become part of your life; you

(1) Macaulay, T. B. Oliver Goldsmith p 18

(2) Black, William " " p 85



the masterly skill with which Goldsmith has drawn the

character of the vicar. He is a man of the early

(1)

captains of the book as having "all the sweetness of

manly feeling, together with all the vivacity of

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And of the humor in the character

of the vicar is of that variety which is very difficult

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where an individual example of the humor of leaves off.

William Black has written an excellent paper on the

comic quality of Goldsmith's humor in this book and

the unusual effect which this kind of humor has upon the

(2)

reader. "There is no instance," there is no instance

you along by the collar; compelling you when certain

lighter; and compelling you to look at this and that

that. The reader stands by you, and looks in the midst

way; and you are laughing too, when suddenly you find the

human beings have suddenly come into the world before

you, and you know them for friends, and even after the

vision has faded away, and the beautiful light and

color and glory of romance-land have vanished you cannot

forget them. They have become part of your life; you

(1) Macaulay, E. B. Oliver Goldsmith

(2) Black, William

will take them to the grave with you."

Unlike Beau Tibbs, the Vicar of Wakefield has a sense of humor and upon most occasions we laugh with him rather than at him. Goldsmith, however, is not unconscious of the Vicar's weaknesses. His credulity and inability to cope with the world are emphasized, but in such a way that Goldsmith seems to be more concerned in pointing out the wickedness of the world than the simplicity of the Vicar. There is, nevertheless, a humorous aspect to this simplicity which makes the Vicar guilty of many irrationalities.

The motives which lead the Vicar to put his wife's epitaph over the chimney-piece are characteristic of the shy humor of this character.

(1)

"I even went a step beyond Whiston in displaying my principles; as he had engraven upon his wife's tomb that she was the only wife of William Whiston; so I wrote a similar epitaph for my wife, though still living, in which I extolled her prudence, economy, and obedience till death; and having got it copied fair, with an elegant frame, it was placed over the chimney-piece, where it answered several very useful purposes. It admonished my wife of her duty to me, and my fidelity to her; it inspired her with a passion for fame, and constantly put her in mind of her end."

In the light of George's misfortunes in the world, his father's optimistic farewell is sardonically humorous.

(1) The Vicar of Wakefield Prior ed. vol III p 24



will come from the grave with you."

While poor little, the vision of

Waverley has a sense of humor and upon most occasions

we laugh with him rather than at him. Waverley's

view, is not a caricature of the Victor's weaknesses. His

weakness and inability to cope with the world and

experience, but in such a way that his position seems to

be more concerned in pointing out the weakness of the

world than the stupidity of the Victor. There is

nevertheless, a humorous aspect to this slightly which

makes the Victor guilty of many ironicalities.

The motives which lead the Victor

to put his wife's opinion over the chimney-piece are

characteristic of the very humor of this character.

(1)

"I even wanted deep beyond station

in displaying my intelligence; as he had chosen to

his wife's term that was the wife of a

child; so I wrote a letter of advice to my wife,

which still lives, in which I expounded her ignorance,

economic, and domestic life; and having got it

copied into, with an elegant frame, it was placed over

the chimney-piece, where it answered several very

useful purposes. It admonished my wife of her duty to

me, and my fidelity to her; it inspired her with a

passion for love, and constantly put her in mind of her

and."

In the light of George's character

in the world, his father's optimistic remark is

characteristically humorous.

(1) The Vision of Waverley, ch. vii, p. 24









The Vicar disposes of the face wash with humorous diplomacy.

(1)

"Washes of all kinds I had a natural antipathy to; for I knew that instead of mending the complexion they spoiled it. I therefore approached my chair by sly degrees to the fire, and grasping the poker, as if it wanted mending, seemingly by accident overturned the whole composition, and it was too late to begin another."

The mock repentance of the Squire deceives the Vicar completely.

(2)

"The two ladies ---- began a very discreet and serious dialogue upon virtue; in this my wife, the chaplain and I joined; and the Squire himself was at last brought to confess a sense of sorrow for his former excesses. We talked of the pleasures of temperance, and of the sunshine in the mind unpolluted with guilt. I was so well pleased, that my little ones were kept up beyond the usual time to be edified by so much conversation. Mr. Thornhill even went beyond me, and demanded if I had any objections to giving prayers. I joyfully embraced the proposal, --"

The Vicar laughs at himself and his family for their behaviour when they believed the Squire would marry Olivia.

(3)

"We looked upon our fortunes as once more rising; and as the whole parish asserted that the Squire was in love with my daughter, she was actually so with him; for they persuaded her into the passion. In this agreeable interval my wife had the most lucky dreams in the world, which she took care to tell us every morning, with great solemnity and exactness. It was one night a coffin and cross bones, the sign of an approaching wedding; at another time she imagined her daughter's pockets filled with farthings, a certain sign of their being shortly stuffed with gold. The girls themselves

(1) The Vicar of Wakefield Prior ed. vol. III p 44

(2) " " " " " " " III p 61

(3) " " " " " " " III p 63













taught to judge properly of such men, and that it would be even madness to expect happiness from one who has been so very bad an economist of his own. Your mother and I have now better prospects for you. The next winter, which you will probably spend in town, will give you opportunities of making a more prudent choice."

At the fair the Vicar is deceived by the scene of benevolence which was arranged for his benefit.

(1)

"But our attention was in a short time taken off by the appearance of a youth, who, entering the room, respectfully said something softly to the old stranger. 'Make no apologies, my child,' said the old man, 'to do good is a duty we owe to all our fellow-creatures; take this, I wish it were more; but five pounds will relieve your distress, and you are welcome.' The modest youth shed tears of gratitude, and yet his gratitude was scarcely equal to mine. I could have hugged the good old man in my arms, his benevolence pleased me so. ----- The old gentleman, hearing my name mentioned, seemed to look at me with attention for some time, and when my friend was gone, most respectfully demanded if I was any way related to the great Primrose, that courageous monogamist, who had been the bulwark of the church. Never did my heart feel sincerer rapture than at that moment. 'Sir,' cried I, 'the applause of so good a man, as I am sure you are, adds to that happiness in my breast which your benevolence has already excited. You behold before you, sir, that Doctor Primrose, the monogamist, whom you have been pleased to call great. You here see that unfortunate Divine, who has so long, and it would ill become me to say, successfully, fought against the deuterogamy of the age.' 'Sir,' cried the stranger, struck with awe, 'I fear I have been too familiar; but you'll forgive my curiosity, sir; I beg pardon.' 'Sir, cried I, grasping his hand, 'you are so far from displeasing me by your familiarity that I must beg you'll accept my friendship, as you already have my esteem.' "

The Vicar proposes a method to detract attention from the fact that he was swindled at

(1) The Vicar of Wakefield Prior ed. vol. III p 81





the fair.

(1)

"No truant was ever more afraid of returning to school, there to behold his master's visage, than I was of going home. I was determined, however, to anticipate their fury, by first falling into a passion myself."

The Vicar expresses a humorous helplessness before his wife's determination.

(2)

"-- and notwithstanding all I could say, and I said much, it was resolved that we should have our pictures done too. Having, therefore, engaged the limner, (for what could I do?) our next deliberation was, to show the superiority of our taste in the attitudes."

The Vicar gives a glowing description of the picture, which shows that he is not entirely free of worldly vanity.

(3)

"As we did not immediately recollect an historical subject to hit us, we were contented each with being drawn as independent historical figures. My wife desired to be represented as Venus, and the painter was desired to be too frugal of his diamonds in her stomacher and hair. Her two little ones were to be as Cupids by her side, while I, in my gown and band, was to present her with my books on the Whistonian controversy. Olivia would be drawn as an Amazon, sitting upon a bank of flowers, dressed in a green joseph, richly laced with gold, and a whip in her hand. Sophia was to be a shepherdess, with as many sheep as the painter could put in for nothing; and Moses was to be dressed out with a hat and white feather. Our taste so much pleased the Squire, that he insisted on being put in as one of the family, in the character of Alexander the Great, at Olivia's feet."

The latter part of the story is much less humorous and so very melodramatic that one is

- |     |     |       |    |           |       |     |      |     |   |    |
|-----|-----|-------|----|-----------|-------|-----|------|-----|---|----|
| (1) | The | Vicar | of | Wakefield | Prior | ed. | vol. | III | p | 85 |
| (2) | "   | "     | "  | "         | "     | "   | "    | III | p | 92 |
| (3) | "   | "     | "  | "         | "     | "   | "    | III | p | 93 |











right for Olivia to inform against the false priest who pretended to marry her, since she had been sworn to secrecy. There is a humorous element in such fine and exasperating distinctions between right and wrong.

(1)

"My dear," I replied, "if you have made such a promise, I cannot, nor will I tempt you to break it. Even though it may benefit the public, you must not inform against him. In all human institutions a smaller evil is allowed to procure a greater good; as in politics, a province may be given away to secure a kingdom; in medicine, a limb may be lopped off to preserve the body. But in religion, the law is written and inflexible, never to do evil. And this law, my child, is right; for otherwise, if we commit a smaller evil to procure a greater good, certain guilt would be thus incurred, in expectation of contingent advantage. And though the advantage should certainly follow, yet the interval between commission and advantage, which is allowed to be guilty, may be that in which we are called away to answer for the things we have done, and the volume of human actions is closed for ever."

The Vicar persists in happiness even though he is in prison and there is the prospect of starvation for his family.

(2)

"After my usual meditations, and having praised my heavenly corrector, I laid myself down and slept with the utmost tranquillity til morning."

#### The Vicar's Wife

The Vicar's wife is humorous because of the decided contrast between her intense ambition for a high social position for her daughters which she believes can be gained by matrimony and her poorly simulated disinterestedness in the matter. She is

(1) The Vicar of Wakefield Prior ed. vol. III p 139

(2) " " " " " " " III p 158



right for Olivia to involve against her false priest who  
pretended to marry her, also said he'd keep women so  
secret. There is a divorce element in such line and  
extraordinary distance between right and wrong.

(1)

"I don't," I replied, "I've been  
and said a number of things, but will I tell you so  
much, when you are in the position of the mother, and  
want to know a thing, in all human relationships  
a mother will be likely to produce a greater good; as  
in politics, a province may be given away to better a  
kingdom; in religion, a life may be looked out for me-  
siah's sake. But in religion, the law is right  
and religious, never to do evil, and to law, the only  
is right; for otherwise, if we were to a mother tell to  
produce a great good, certainly this would be fine  
indeed, in the case of a mother and a daughter, and  
then in the case of a mother and a daughter, for the  
law is right between a mother and a daughter, and  
allowed to be right, may be that in which we are called  
to answer for the things we have done, and the  
voice of human nature is closed for ever."

The Vice-Regent in his presence

though he is in prison and there is the respect of

intention for the land.

(2)

"After my great satisfaction, and  
having proved my heavenly direction, I have myself been  
and sleep with the most tranquillity of mind."

The Vice-Regent

The Vice-Regent's wife is a human being

of the highest contrast between her human and divine

a high social position for her daughter, which she

believes can be gained by earthly and her society

stimulated by her husband's in the matter. She is

(3) The Vice-Regent of Whitefield, prior to, and after  
the year 1840

ignorant, illogical, a stubborn victim of wishful thinking, and a character true to life in all her follies and virtues.

Although penniless, she demands birth and fortune from any who court her daughters.

(1)

" -- my wife observing as he went, that she liked him extremely, and protesting, that if he had birth and fortune to entitle him to match into such a family as ours, she knew no man she would sooner fix upon. I could not but smile to hear her talk in this lofty strain; but I was never much displeased with those harmless delusions that tend to make us more happy."

In spite of a total lack of evidence to support such an opinion, the Vicar's wife considers her daughter so well trained in controversy that she will be able to convert Squire Thornhill if she can get him for a husband.

(2)

" 'And who knows, my dear,' continued she, 'what Olivia may be able to do? The girl has a great deal to say upon every subject, and to my knowledge is very well skilled in controversy.'

'Why, my dear, what controversy can she have ready?' cried I. 'It does not occur to me that I ever put such books into her hands; you certainly over-rate her merit.' 'Indeed, papa,' replied Olivia, 'she does not; I have read the disputes between Thwackum and Square; the controversy between Robinson Crusoe and Friday the savage, and I am now employed in reading the controversy in Religious Courtship.' 'Very well,' cried I, 'that's a good girl, I find you are perfectly qualified for making converts; and so go help your mother to make the gooseberry-pie.'

With characteristic shrewdness, the

- (1) The Vicar of Wakefield Prior ed. vol. III p 33  
 (2) " " " " " " " III p 49





Vicar's wife makes sure that her daughters always have money.

(1)

"I gave them each a shilling; though, for the honor of the family, it must be observed, that they never went without money themselves, as my wife always generously let them have a guinea each, to keep in their pockets; but with strict injunctions never to change it."

The Vicar's wife, having no sense of humor, mistakes crudity for wit and is herself a subject of humor.

(2)

" --- 'A fine day, Mr. Burchell.' -- 'A very fine day, Doctor; though I fancy we shall have some rain, by the shooting of my corns.' --- 'The shooting of your horns,' cried my wife, in a loud fit of laughter, and then asked pardon for being fond of a joke. --- 'Dear Madam,' replied he, 'I pardon you with all my heart; for I protest I should not have thought it a joke had you not told me.' --- 'Perhaps not, sir,' cried my wife, winking at us, 'and yet I dare say you can tell us how many jokes go to an ounce?' --- 'I fancy, madam,' returned Burchell, 'you have been reading a jest book this morning, that ounce of jokes is so very good a conceit; and yet, madam, I had rather see half an ounce of understanding.' --- 'I believe you might,' cried my wife, still smiling at us, though the laugh was against her; 'and yet I have seen some men pretend to understanding that have very little.' --- 'And no doubt,' returned her antagonist, 'you have known ladies set up for wit that had none.' --- I quickly began to find that my wife was likely to gain but little at this business."

The Vicar's wife uses all her cunning in clearly obvious efforts to get the Squire to propose marriage to Olivia.

(3)

"It must be owned that my wife laid a

- |     |     |       |    |           |       |     |      |     |   |    |
|-----|-----|-------|----|-----------|-------|-----|------|-----|---|----|
| (1) | The | Vicar | of | Wakefield | Prior | ed. | vol. | III | p | 62 |
| (2) | "   | "     | "  | "         | "     | "   | "    | III | p | 88 |
| (3) | "   | "     | "  | "         | "     | "   | "    | III | p | 91 |





thousand schemes to entrap him; or to speak more tenderly, used every art to magnify the merit of her daughter. If the cakes at tea eat short and crisp, they were made by Olivia; if the gooseberry wine was well knit, the gooseberries were of her gathering; it was her fingers which gave the pickles their peculiar green; and in the composition of a pudding, it was her judgment that mixed the ingredients. Then the poor woman would sometimes tell the Squire, that she thought him and Olivia extremely of a size, and would bid both stand up to see which was tallest."

### Croaker

The humorous characters in Goldsmith's plays are much less subtle than those in his other works. The plays are farces which depend upon incongruous situations for much of their humor. That this should be so, may be because, as Goldsmith explained in the preface to "The Good-Natured Man,"<sup>(1)</sup> he was extremely anxious to turn the public taste from the popular sentimental drama back to comedies such as Moliere had written and which had been banished from the French stage together with all form of humor in favor of the genteel comedy. Possibly he thought that the farce, a decided contrast to the sentimental drama, would be more acceptable to the town than the subtlety of true comedy. Although the humor of the characters in the plays is broad and obvious, nevertheless, it is always consistent.

Croaker is humorous because, true to

(1) Good-Natured Man Prior ed. Vol. IV p 183



the first of these to enter the room, and to stand near the door, as if to guard it. The second of these to enter the room, and to stand near the door, as if to guard it. The third of these to enter the room, and to stand near the door, as if to guard it. The fourth of these to enter the room, and to stand near the door, as if to guard it. The fifth of these to enter the room, and to stand near the door, as if to guard it. The sixth of these to enter the room, and to stand near the door, as if to guard it. The seventh of these to enter the room, and to stand near the door, as if to guard it. The eighth of these to enter the room, and to stand near the door, as if to guard it. The ninth of these to enter the room, and to stand near the door, as if to guard it. The tenth of these to enter the room, and to stand near the door, as if to guard it.

### Conclusion

The first of these to enter the room, and to stand near the door, as if to guard it. The second of these to enter the room, and to stand near the door, as if to guard it. The third of these to enter the room, and to stand near the door, as if to guard it. The fourth of these to enter the room, and to stand near the door, as if to guard it. The fifth of these to enter the room, and to stand near the door, as if to guard it. The sixth of these to enter the room, and to stand near the door, as if to guard it. The seventh of these to enter the room, and to stand near the door, as if to guard it. The eighth of these to enter the room, and to stand near the door, as if to guard it. The ninth of these to enter the room, and to stand near the door, as if to guard it. The tenth of these to enter the room, and to stand near the door, as if to guard it.

his name, he is filled with groundless fear and pessimism. Before Croaker comes upon the stage Jarvis gives the following description of him.

(1)

" 'A raven that bodes nothing but mischief; a coffin and cross-bones; a bundle of rue; a sprig of deadly night-shade; - ' "

Many pessimistic remarks are included in Croaker's opening conversation with Honeywood.

(2)

" 'A pleasant morning to Mr. Honeywood, and many of them. How is this! you look most shockingly to-day, my dear friend. I hope this weather does not affect your spirits. To be sure, if this weather continues - I say nothing - But God send we be all better this day three months! --- Indeed, what signifies what weather we have in a country going to ruin like ours? Taxes rising and trade falling. Money flying out of the kingdom, and Jesuits swarming into it. I know at this time no less than a hundred and twenty-seven Jesuits between Charingcross and Temple-bar. ---- Indeed, what signifies whom they pervert in a country that has scarce any religion to lose, I'm only afraid for our wives and daughters. ---- Indeed, what signifies whether they be perverted or no? The women in my time were good for something. I have seen a lady drest from top to toe in her own manufactures formerly. But now-a-days, the devil a thing of their own manufacture's about them, except their faces. ---- People think, indeed, because they see me come out in a morning thus, with a pleasant face, and to make my friends merry, that all's well within. But I have cares that would break a heart of stone. My wife has so encroached upon every one of my privileges, that I'm now no more than a mere lodger in my own house. ---- Ah, my dear friend, these were the very words of poor Dick Doleful to me not a week before he made away with himself. Indeed, Mr. Honeywood, I never see you but you put me in mind of poor Dick. ---- Ah, he grew sick of this miserable life, where we do nothing but eat and grow hungry, dress and undress, get up and lie down; while reason, that should watch like a

(1) The Good-Natured Man Prior ed. vol IV p 195

(2) " " " " " " IV p 195-198





nurse by our side, falls as fast asleep as we do. ----  
Life at the greatest and best is but a froward child,  
that must be humored and coaxed a little till it falls  
asleep, and then all the care is over.' "

Croaker is humorous in his stubborn-  
ness as well as in his pessimism. The attitude with  
which he proposes to listen to his son's reasons for not  
marrying Miss Richland is typical of such a character.

(1)

" 'Come, then, produce your reason.  
I tell you, I'm fixed, determined; so now produce your  
reasons. When I'm determined, I always listen to reason,  
because it can then do no harm.

Leon. You have alleged that a mutual choice  
was the first requisite in matrimonial happiness.

Cro. Well, and you have both of you a  
mutual choice. She has her choice - to marry you, or  
lose half her fortune; and you have your choice - to  
marry her, or pack out of doors without any fortune at  
all.' "

### Lofty

Lofty is humorous in his pretended  
importance. This characteristic is emphasized very  
cleverly in his entrance.

(2)

"Lofty, (to his servant) 'And if the  
Venetian ambassador, or that teasing creature the  
Marquis, should call, I'm not at home. Dam'me, I'll be  
pack-horse to none of them.' My dear madam, I have  
just snatched a moment - ' And if the expresses to his  
grace be ready, let them be sent off; they're of import-  
ance.' - Madam, I ask a thousand pardons.

Mrs. Cro. Sir, this honor -

Lofty. 'And, Dubardieu! if the person calls  
about the commission, let him know that it is made out.  
As for Lord Cumbercourt's request, it can keep cold; you  
understand me.' - Madam, I ask ten thousand pardons.

Mrs. Cro. Sir, this honor -

(1) The Good-Natured Man Prior ed. vol. IV p 203

(2) " " " " " " IV p 211



...and then all the time is over...  
...and then all the time is over...  
...and then all the time is over...

...and then all the time is over...  
...and then all the time is over...

...and then all the time is over...  
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Lofty. 'And, Dubardieu! if the man comes from the Cornish borough, you must do him; you must do him, I say.' - Madam I ask ten thousand pardons. - 'And if the Russian ambassador calls; but he will scarce call to-day, I believe! - And now, madam, I have just got time to express my happiness in having the honor of being permitted to profess myself your most obedient humble servant.' "

Lofty is too important to bother with poetry.

(1)

"Lofty. Oh, a modern! we men of business despise the moderns; and as for the ancients, we have no time to read them. Poetry is a pretty thing enough for our wives and daughters; but not for us. Why now, here I stand that know nothing of books. I say, madam, I know nothing of books; and yet, I believe, upon a land-carriage fishery, a stamp act, of a jaghire, I can talk my two hours without feeling the want of them."

Lofty's claim to modesty is included in his enumeration of his virtues.

(2)

"Mrs. Croaker. The world is no stranger to Mr. Lofty's eminence in every capacity.

Lofty. I vow to gad, Madam, you make me blush. I'm nothing, nothing, nothing in the world; a mere obscure gentleman. To be sure, indeed, one or two of the present ministers are pleased to represent me as a formidable man. I know they are pleased to bespatter me at all their little dirty levees. Yet, upon my soul, I wonder what they see in me to treat me so! Measures, not men, have always been my mark; and I vow, by all that's honorable, my resentment has never done the men, as mere men, any manner of harm - that is, as mere men.

Mrs. Cro. What importance, and yet what modesty!

Lofty. Oh, if you talk of modesty, Madam, there, I own, I'm accessible to praise; modesty is my foible; it was so the Duke of Brentford used to say of me. 'I love Jack Lofty,' he used to say. 'No man has a finer knowledge of things; quite a man of information; and, when he speaks upon his legs, by the Lord he's

(1) The Good-Natured Man Prior ed. vol. IV p 212

(2) " " " " " " Iv p 212





prodigious, he scouts them; and yet all men have their faults; too much modesty is his,' says his Grace."

Briefly, as befits a man of business, Lofty tells Miss Richland how affairs are carried on among the great.

(1)

"My dear Madam, all this is but a mere exchange; we do greater things for one another every day. Why, as thus, now; let me suppose you the first lord of the treasury; you have an employment in you that I want; I have a place in me that you want; do me here, do you there; interest of both sides, few words, flat, done and done, and it's over."

Lofty airs his pretended acquaintance with the great.

(2)

"This month! it must certainly be so - Sir Gilbert's letter did come to me from Newmarket, so that he must have met his lordship there; and so it came about. I have his letter about me; I'll read it to you - (Taking out a large bundle). That's from Paoli of Corsica; that from the Marquis of Squilachi. - Have you a mind to see a letter from Count Poniatowski, now King of Poland? - Honest Pon - (Searching). O, Sir! what, are you here too? "

### Tony Lumpkin

Tony is humorous because of his impudence. The incongruity necessary to humor is found in the contrast between his coarse, blustering behaviour and the gentility of the rest of the characters.

(3)

Black says of this character, "Tony Lumpkin is one of the especial favorites of the theatre-going public; and no wonder. With all the young cub's

(1) The Good-Natured Man Prior ed. vol IV 230

(2) " " " " " " IV 259

(3) Black, William - Oliver Goldsmith p 135





jibs and jeers, his impudence and grimaces, one has a sneaking love for the scapegrace; we laugh with him, rather than at him; how can we fail to enjoy those malevolent tricks of his when he so obviously enjoys them himself?" The ability of the humorist to make crooks somewhat likeable, and villains amusing is the highest  
(1)  
form of humor, says Stephen Leacock in praise of Dickens for his success in this respect.

Tony describes his family to the strangers.

(2)

"Pray, gentlemen, is not this same Hardcastle a cross-grained, old-fashioned, whimsical fellow, with an ugly face, a daughter, and a pretty son?"

Hast. We have not seen the gentleman; but he has the family you mention.

Tony. The daughter, a tall, trapesing, trolloping, talkative, may-pole - the son, a pretty, well-bred, agreeable youth, that everybody is fond of."

Quick action is Tony's method of carrying out the theft of the jewels from his mother.

(3)

"Hast. But how have you procured them from your mother?"

Tony. Ask me no questions, and I'll tell you no fibs. I procured them by the rule of thumb. If I had not the key to every drawer in mother's bureau, how could I go to the alehouse so often as I do? An honest man may rob himself of his own at any time."

Tony finds it inconvenient not to be able to read.

(1) Leacock, Stephen - Humor Its Theory and Technique p 125

(2) She Stoops to Conquer Prior ed. vol IV p 282

(3) " " " " " " " IV p 310



him and Jesse, but I believe and understand, and this is

showing love for the negro race; we laugh with him.

rather than at him; now can we fail to enjoy these

unfettered trials of his when he so cheerfully enjoys them

himself? The reality of the trials is more than

somewhat disguised, and with this meaning in the subject

form of story, says Emerson, "the trials of his life

for his success in this respect.

They describe his life really to the

struggle.

(2)

himself, and this is not the same

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(1)

"A damned cramp piece of penmanship, as ever I saw in my life. I can read your print hand very well. But here there are such handles, and shanks, and dashes, that one can scarce know the head from the tail. 'To Anthony Lumpkin, Esquire.' It's very odd, I can read the outside of my letters, where my own name is, well enough. But when I come to open it, it's all - buzz. That's hard, very hard; for the inside of the letter is always the cream of the correspondence."

Tony has an inspiration which he enjoys shrouding in mystery.

(2)

"Ecod, I have it; it's here. Your hands. Yours and yours, my poor Sulky. - My boots there, ho! Meet me two hours hence at the bottom of the garden; and if you don't find Tony Lumpkin a more good-natured fellow than you thought for, I'll give you leave to take my best horse, and Bet Bouncer into the bargain. Come along. My boots, ho! "

With characteristic gusto Tony describes the ride he gave his mother and his cousin.

(3)

"You shall hear. I first took them down Feather-bed Lane, where we stuck fast in the mud. I then rattled them crack over the stones of Up-and-down Hill. I then introduced them to the gibbet on Heavy-tree Heath; and from that, with a circumbendibus, I fairly lodged them in the horse-pond at the bottom of the garden."

Tony prefers the rural method of settling disputes.

(4)

"Ay, now it's dear friend, noble Squire. Just now, it was all idiot, cub, and run me through the guts. Damn your way of fighting, I say. After we take a knock in this part of the country, we kiss and be friends. But if you had run me through the guts, then I should be dead, and you might go and kiss the hangman."

- |     |     |        |    |         |       |     |      |    |   |     |
|-----|-----|--------|----|---------|-------|-----|------|----|---|-----|
| (1) | She | Stoops | to | Conquer | Prior | ed. | Vol. | IV | p | 330 |
| (2) | "   | "      | "  | "       | "     | "   | "    | IV | p | 334 |
| (3) | "   | "      | "  | "       | "     | "   | "    | IV | p | 340 |
| (4) | "   | "      | "  | "       | "     | "   | "    | IV | p | 340 |



(1)

"A German strong sense of gentlemanly  
as ever I was in life. I can read your mind  
very well. But here there are such matters, and things  
and things, that I can scarce know the mind from the heart.  
The Anthony speaking, English. It's very odd, I can read  
the outside of my letters, where my own name is, well.  
except. But when I come to open it, it's all - gone.  
That's hard, very hard; for the inside of the letter is  
always the crown of the correspondence."

They had an illustration which he

enjoyed thoroughly in his way.

(2)

"Good, I have it; it's here. Your  
letters and yours, my dear Sally. - My books there,  
no! Most no two letters here at the bottom of the basket;  
and if you don't find Tony inside a more good-looking  
fellow than you thought for, I'll have you leave to take  
my best horse, and let yourself into the bargain. Come  
along, my books, no!"

With characteristic haste Tony

described the whole he gave his mother and his cousin.

(3)

"You shall hear. I must look down  
down Father's box, where we shall find in the way. I  
then settled them over the boxes of up-and-down  
all. I then looked at them to the right on every-  
thing; and from that, with a correspondence, I finally  
looked them in the horse-pen at the bottom of the  
garden."

Tony pretends the whole matter of

republican dispatch.

(4)

"Ah, now it's dangerous, no! No  
danger. Just now, it was all right, and then he  
brought the news. When I was of the age, I say. After  
we take a look in this part of the country, we know  
and as friends. But if you had not known the news,  
then I should be dead, and so might you and Miss the  
sister."

(1)	One	Books	to	Company	Trav. Co.	101	IV p 330
(2)	"	"	"	"	"	"	"
(3)	"	"	"	"	"	"	IV p 334
(4)	"	"	"	"	"	"	IV p 340
(5)	"	"	"	"	"	"	IV p 340

A list of Goldsmith's humorous characters would not be complete without his description of the village schoolmaster which is the only bit of humor found in the 'Deserted Village'.

(1)

"The village master taught his little school:  
A man severe he was, and stern to view,  
I knew him well, and every truant knew;  
Well had the boding tremblers learned to trace  
The day's disasters in his morning face;  
Full well they laughed with counterfeited glee  
At all his jokes, for many a joke had he;  
Full well the busy whisper circling round,  
Conveyed the dismal tidings when he frown'd;"

This passage affords another example of the real humor in which Goldsmith excelled.

(1) The Deserted Village Prior ed. vol. IV p 72



A list of buildings in the village of...

not as complete without a description of the village

accommodation which is the only bit of modern life in

the 'Deserted Village'.

(1)

"The village center is a little square;  
a man sits on a stool, and looks to the  
right and left, and every one knows  
well and the house is turned to the  
right, a distance of his own house;  
all well they have with their own hands  
at all the house, for many a time has  
all well the house of the village;  
conveyed the house of the village."

This is the first of the houses of the

first house in which the village is situated.

(1) The Deserted Village. Part II. Vol. IV. p. 72

### Incongruity in incident

In his plays, in the "Vicar of Wakefield" and to a lesser degree in the Essays there are many examples of the use of humorous incidents. Here the element of surprise is uppermost. The reader is prepared for something unusual but not for the thing that does happen.

### The Bee

The humorous situations in the Essays and in the "Vicar of Wakefield" are told in leisurely fashion. Many details are given composing a background which enhances the humor of the situation. In this passage we are told of a walk taken by two elderly cousins in the park.

(1)

"When we made our entry at the park, two antiquated figures, so polite and so tender as we seemed to be, soon attracted the eyes of the company. As we made our way among crowds who were out to show their finery as well as we, wherever we came I perceived we brought good-humor in our train. The polite could not forbear smiling, and the vulgar burst out into a horse laugh at our grotesque figures. Cousin Hannah, who was perfectly conscious of the rectitude of her own appearance, attributed all this mirth to the oddity of mine; while I as cordially placed the whole to her account. Thus, from being two of the best-natured creatures alive, before we got half-way up the mall, we both began to grow peevish, and like two mice on a string, endeavored to revenge the impertinence of others upon ourselves. "I am amazed, cousin Jeffery," says Miss, "that I can never get you to dress like a Christian. I knew we should have the eyes of the Park upon us, with your great wig so frizzed, and yet so beggarly, and your monstrous muffs. I hate those odious muffs."

(1) The Bee Prior ed. vol I p 35



Incidents in the life of

In his plays is the "Victor of Waterloo" and to a lesser degree in the Essays. There are many examples of the use of numerous incidents. Here the element of surprise is important. The reader is prepared for something unusual but not for the thing that most happens.

The Book

The numerous incidents in the Essays and in the "Victor of Waterloo" are told in a leisurely fashion. Many details are given, composing a background which enhances the humor of the situation. In this passage we are told of a walk taken by two elderly persons in the park.

(1)

"When we made our entry at the park, two antiquated figures, so gentle and so tender as we seemed to be, soon attracted the eyes of the company. As we were our way among crowds who were out to show their finest as well as we, wherever we came I perceived we brought good news in our train. The police would not let us pass and the valet burst out into a horse laugh at our grotesque figures. Countess Hannah, who was perfectly conscious of the necessity of her own appearance, attributed all this to the oddity of mine; while I as modestly placed the whole to her account. Thus, from being two of the most hated creatures alive, before we got half-way up the hill, we both began to look too old, and like two mice on a string, discovered by revenge the ferociousness of others soon overcast. "I am sure," Countess Jellie," says Miss. "that I can never get you to dress like a Christian. I know we should have the eyes of the Park upon us, with good reason, and yet so poorly, and your monstrous walk. I hate those old men."

(1) The Book, Vol. I, p. 53



I could have patiently borne a criticism on all the rest of my equipage; but, as I had always a peculiar veneration for my muff, I could not forbear being piqued a little; and throwing my eyes with a spiteful air on her bosom, "I could heartily wish, madam," replied I, "that, for your sake, my muff was cut into a tippet."

The story of Dick Wildgoose, the spendthrift is told with appreciative relish as Goldsmith could well sympathize with such a character as Dick.

(1)

"His inattention to money matters had incensed his father to such a degree, that all the intercession of friends in his favor was fruitless. The old gentleman was on his death-bed. The whole family, and Dick among the number gathered round him. I leave my son Andrew, said the expiring miser, my whole estate, and desire him to be frugal. Andrew, in a sorrowful tone, as is usual on these occasions, "prayed heaven to prolong his life and health to enjoy it himself." I recommend Simon, my third son, to the care of his elder brother, and leave him beside four thousand pounds. "Ah! father," cried Simon, (in great affliction, to be sure,) "may heaven give you life and health to enjoy it yourself! At last, turning to poor Dick; "as for you, you always have been a sad dog, you'll never be rich, I'll leave you a shilling to buy a halter." "Ah! father," cries Dick, without any emotion, "may heaven give you life and health to enjoy it yourself!"

Jack Spindler, having lost his fair-weather friends along with his fortune, tries to get an invitation to dinner.

(2)

"The last place I saw poor Jack was at the Rev. Dr. Gosling's. He had, as he fancied, just nicked the time, for he came in as the cloth was laying. He took a chair without being desired, and talked for some time without being attended to. He assured the company, that nothing procured so good an appetite as a walk to white Conduit-House where he had been that morning. He looked at the

(1) The Bee Prior ed. vol I p 47

(2) The Bee Prior ed. vol I p 55



I could have possibly known a suspicion on all the rest  
of my acquaintances; but, as I had always a peculiar reputation  
for my wit, I could not forget to show a little  
and throw my eyes with a careless air on her bosom, "I  
could possibly wish, indeed," replied I, "that, for your  
sake, my wife had been a virgin."

The story of Black Willoughby, the gambler, is  
told with appreciation as reliable as Goldsmith could well give  
credence with such a character as Black.

(1)  
"His inclination to money matters had increased  
his father to such a degree, that all the inclination  
of friends in his favor was trifling. The old gentleman  
was on his death-bed. The whole family, and all the  
the money, gathered round him. I have seen him, and  
the evening after, my wife was, and I have seen him  
frugal. Indeed, in a moment of time, he is never on these  
occasions, "I have given to women, his life and health  
to enjoy it himself." I remember at one of my wife's  
to the care of his elder brother, and leave him to  
love and care for him. "Al! father," cried Simon, (in great  
affliction, to be sure,) "may heaven give you life and  
health to enjoy it yourself! At least, turning to your  
wife: "as for you, you have been a good deal, you'll  
never be rich, I'll leave you a willing to buy a better."  
"Al! father," cried Alice, without any emotion, "may heaven  
give you life and health to enjoy it yourself!"

Jack Spaulding, having lost his fair-weather  
friendship with his fortune, turns to an old friend  
for advice.

(2)  
"The last time I saw poor Jack was at the last  
of his life. He had, as we thought, just died. I  
went to the house in the night, and I look at  
him without being able to speak, and I feel for some time with  
out being able to do so. He seemed to be dead, but I  
went to look at him as a wife to a husband, and I  
found that he had been that morning. He looked at the

(1) The See      Trial 23.      Vol 1 23.  
(2) The See      Trial 21.      Vol 1 23.



table-cloth and praised the figure of the damask; talked of a feast where he had been the day before, but that the venison was overdone. All this, however, procured the poor creature no invitation, and he was not yet sufficiently hardened to stay without being asked; wherefore, finding the gentleman of the house insensible to all his fetches, he thought proper, at last to retire, and mend his appetite by a walk in the Park."

### The Vicar of Wakefield

Often one reads the humorous situations in "The Vicar of Wakefield" with mixed emotions. The characters have become so real that it seems unkind to laugh at their misfortunes. Such is the case in the following quotation which tells of the attempt of the Vicar's family to ride to church.

(1)

"I waited near an hour in the reading desk for their arrival; but not finding them come as expected, I was obliged to begin, and went through the service, not without some uneasiness at finding them absent. This was increased when all was finished, and no appearance of the family. I therefore walked back by the horseway, which was five miles round, though the footway was but two, and when I got half way home perceived the procession marching slowly forward towards the church; my son, my wife, and the two little ones exalted on one horse, and my two daughters upon the other. I demanded the cause of their delay; but I soon found by their looks they had met with a thousand misfortunes on the road. The horses had at first refused to move from the door, till Mr. Burchell was kind enough to beat them forward for about two hundred yards with his cudgel. Next, the straps of my wife's pillion broke down, and they were obliged to stop to repair them before they could proceed. After that, one of the horses took it into his head to stand still, and neither blows nor entreaties could prevail with him to proceed. He was just recovering from this dismal situation when I found them."

(1) The Vicar of Wakefield Vol. III p 65



...and raised the figure of the giant; raised  
of a forest where he had been the day before, and that the  
...was everyone. All this, however, occurred the year  
...no indication, and he was not yet sufficiently  
...asked; therefore, finding  
...the position of the house insensible to all his efforts,  
...he thought proper, at last to retire, and send his agents  
by a note in the form of

### The Viceroy of Mexico

Often we read the famous statement in  
"The Viceroy of Mexico" with mixed emotions. The statement  
have become so real that it seems nothing so large as to  
...Such is the case in the following statement  
which tells of the attempt of the Viceroy to visit  
to Canada.

I walked near an hour in the morning  
for their arrival; but not finding them come as expected,  
I was obliged to begin, and went through the service, not  
without some misgivings at finding them absent. This was  
increased when all was finished, and no appearance of the  
family. I therefore walked back by the rearway, which  
was five miles round, though the footway was but two, and  
when I got half way home perceived the procession waiting  
slightly forward towards the church; as soon, my wife, and the  
two little ones excited on one horse, and my two daughters  
near the other. I remarked the countess of this delay, but  
I soon found as their looks they had met with a thousand  
...on the road. The horses had at first refused  
to move from the door, till Mr. Pouchell was with  
to seat them forward for about two hundred yards with  
his help. He, the countess of my wife's little horse  
first, and they were obliged to seek to retreat then before  
they could proceed. At the entrance of the horses and  
at last he had to step still, and neither horse nor  
...with him to proceed. We were  
just returning from this slight excursion when I found  
them.



Again, even though we laugh we cannot but sympathize with the Vicar's daughters who are caught playing a rustic game by the great ladies from town.

(1)

"As every person may not be acquainted with this primeval pastime, it may be necessary to observe, that the company at this play plant themselves in a ring upon the ground, all except one who stands in the middle, whose business it is to catch a shoe, which the company shove about under their hams from one to another, something like a weaver's shuttle. As it is impossible, in this case, for the lady who is up to face all the company at once, the great beauty of the play lies in hitting her a thump with the heel of the shoe on that side least capable of making a defence. It was in this manner that my eldest daughter was hemmed in, and thumped about, all blowzed, in spirits, and bawling for fair play, fair play, with a voice that might deafen a ballad-singer, when confusion on confusion, who should enter the room but our two great acquaintances from town, Lady Blarney and Miss. Carolina Wilhelmina Amelia Skeggs! Description would but beggar, therefore it is unnecessary to describe this new mortification. Death! be seen by ladies of such high breeding in such vulgar attitudes!"

The surprise element is increased by the way in which suspense is introduced in the passage which tells of Moses return from the fair.

(2)

"As she spoke, Moses came slowly on foot, and sweating under the deal box, which he had strapped round his shoulders like a pedler.- 'Welcome, welcome, Moses; well my boy, what have you brought us from the fair?'-- 'I have brought you myself,' cried Moses, with a sly look, and resting the box on the dresser.- 'Ah, Moses, 'cried my wife, 'that we know, but where is the horse?' 'I have sold him,' cried Moses, 'for three pounds five shillings and twopence. 'Well done my good boy,' returned she, 'I knew you would touch them off. Between ourselves, three pounds five shillings and twopence is no bad day's

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|-----|------------------------|-----------|------|-----|------|
| (1) | The Vicar of Wakefield | Prior ed. | vol. | III | p 67 |
| (2) | "                      | "         | "    | III | p 75 |







work. Come, let us have it then.' -- 'I have brought back no money,' cried Moses again. 'I have laid it all out in a bargain, and here it is,' pulling out a bundle from his breast: here they are: a gross of green spectacles, with silver rims and shagreen cases.' -- 'A gross of green spectacles!' repeated my wife in a faint voice. 'And you have parted with the colt, and brought us back nothing but a gross of green paltry spectacles!' -- 'Dear mother,' cried the boy, 'why won't you listen to reason? I had them a dead bargain, or I would not have bought them. The silver rims alone will sell for double the money.' -- 'A fig for the silver rims,' cried my wife, in a passion: 'I dare swear they won't sell for above half the money at the rate of broken silver, five shillings an ounce.' -- 'You need be under no uneasiness,' cried I, 'about selling the rims; for they are not worth sixpence, for I perceive they are only copper varnished over.' -- 'What,' cried my wife, 'not silver, the rims not silver!' 'No,' cried I, 'no more silver than your saucepan.'"

The misfortune attending the family portrait borders upon farcical humor.

(1)

"The piece was large, and it must be owned he did not spare his colors; for which my wife gave him great encomiums. We were all perfectly satisfied with his performance; but an unfortunate circumstance which had not occurred till the picture was finished, now struck us with dismay. It was so very large that we had no place in the house to fix it. How we all came to disregard so material a point is inconceivable; but certain it is, we had all been greatly remiss. The picture, therefore, instead of gratifying our vanity, as we hoped, leaned, in a most mortifying manner, against the kitchen wall, where the canvas was stretched and painted, much too large to be got through any of the doors, and the jest of all our neighbors. One compared it to Robinson Crusoe's long-boat, too large to be removed; another thought it more resembled a reel in a bottle; some wondered how it could be got out, but still more were amazed how it ever got in."

In George ill-fated petitions to a great man, Goldsmith attacks once more his favorite subject of

(1) The Vicar of Wakefield Prior ed. vol. III p 93

(1) The Vicar of Wakefield Prior ed. vol. III p 93







fawning upon the great.

(1)

"However, after bribing the servants with half my worldly fortune, I was at last shown into a spacious apartment, my letter being previously sent up for his lordship's inspection. During this anxious interval I had full time to look round me. Every thing was grand and of happy contrivance: the paintings, the furniture, the gildings, petrified me with awe, and raised my idea of the owner. Ah, thought I to myself, how very great must the possessor of all these things be, who carries in his head the business of the state, and whose house displays half the wealth of a kingdom: sure his genius must be unfathomable! During these awful reflections I heard a step come heavily forward. Ah, this is the great man himself! No, it was only a chambermaid. Another foot was heard soon after. This must be he! No, it was only the great man's valet de chambre. At last his lordship actually made his appearance. Are you, cried he, the bearer of this here letter? I answered with a bow. I learn by this, continued he, as how that - But just at that instant a servant delivered him a card, and without taking farther notice, he went out of the room and left me to digest my own happiness at leisure. I saw no more of him till told by a footman that his lordship was going to his coach at the door. Down I immediately followed, and joined my voice to that of three or four more, who came like me, to petition for favors. His lordship, however, went too fast for us, and was gaining his chariot door with large strides, when I hallooed out to know if I was to have any reply. He was by this time got in, and muttered an answer, half of which only I heard, the other half was lost in the rattling on his chariot wheels. I stood for some time with my neck stretched out, in the posture of one that was listening to catch the glorious sounds, till looking round me, I found myself alone at his lordship's gate."

#### The Good-natured Man

In both "The Good-Natured Man" and "She Stoops to Conquer" humorous situations follow one another in rapid succession until the final curtain. Added proof

(1) The Vicar of Wakefield Prior ed. vol. III p 125





that Goldsmith was chiefly concerned with getting humor (1) into the drama again is shown by his reported conversation with Northcote, a pupil of Sir. Joshua Reynolds. Concerning "She Stoops to Conquer," Goldsmith asked, "Did it make you laugh?" "Exceedingly," was the reply. "Then," continued the Poet, "that is all that I require."

The humorous situations in the plays are not original. They are the familiar ones such as mistaken identity, and the discomfiture of individuals placed in a false position. They are introduced in a plausible manner, however, and the action of both plays moves too swiftly to allow an audience to become over critical. Early in "The Good-Natured Man" Croaker forces his son Leontine to propose to Miss. Richland. This is a typical example of the farical humor of incident which we find in the plays.

(2)

"Cro. How, boy, could you desire a finer opening? Why don't you begin, I say?

Leon. 'Tis true, Madam, my father, Madam, has some intentions - hem - of explaining an affair - which - himself - can best explain, Madam.

Cro. Yes, my dear; it comes entirely from my son; it's all a request of his own, Madam. And I will permit him to make the best of it.

Leon. The whole affair is only this, Madam; my father has a proposal to make, which he insists none but himself shall deliver.

Cro. My mind misgives me, the fellow will never be brought on (aside). In short, Madam, you see before you one that loves you, one whose happiness is all in you.

Miss Rich. I never had any doubts of your regard Sir; and I hope you can have none of my duty.

Cro. That's not the thing, my little sweeting;

(1) Prior, James Life of Oliver Goldsmith p447

(2) ~~The Good-natured Man Prior ed. vol. IV p 206~~





my love! No, no, another-guess lover than I: there he stands, Madam, his very looks declare the force of his passion - Call up a look, you dog! (aside). - But then, had you seen him, as I have, weeping, speaking soliloquies and blank verse, sometimes melancholy, and sometimes absent.

Miss Rich. I fear, Sir, he's absent now; or such a declaration would have come most properly from himself."

Another example is the discomfiture of Honeywood, in custody of the bailiff and his follower, whom he has to present to Miss Richland as his friends.

(1)

"I'm quite displeased when I see a fine subject spoiled by a dull writer.

Honey. We should not be so severe against dull writers, Madam. It is ten to one but the dullest writer exceeds the most rigid French critic who presumes to despise him.

Fol. Damn the French, the *parle vous*, and all that belongs to them.

Miss Rich. Sir!

Honey. Ha, ha, ha! honest Mr. Flanagan. A true English officer, Madam; he's not contented with beating the French, but he will scold them too.

Miss Rich. Yet, Mr. Honeywood, this does not convince me but that severity in criticism is necessary. It was our first adopting the severity of French taste, that has brought them in turn to taste us.

Bai. Taste us! By the Lord, Madam, they devour us. Give monseers but a taste, and I'll be damn'd but they come in for a bellyful.

Miss Rich. Very extraordinary this!

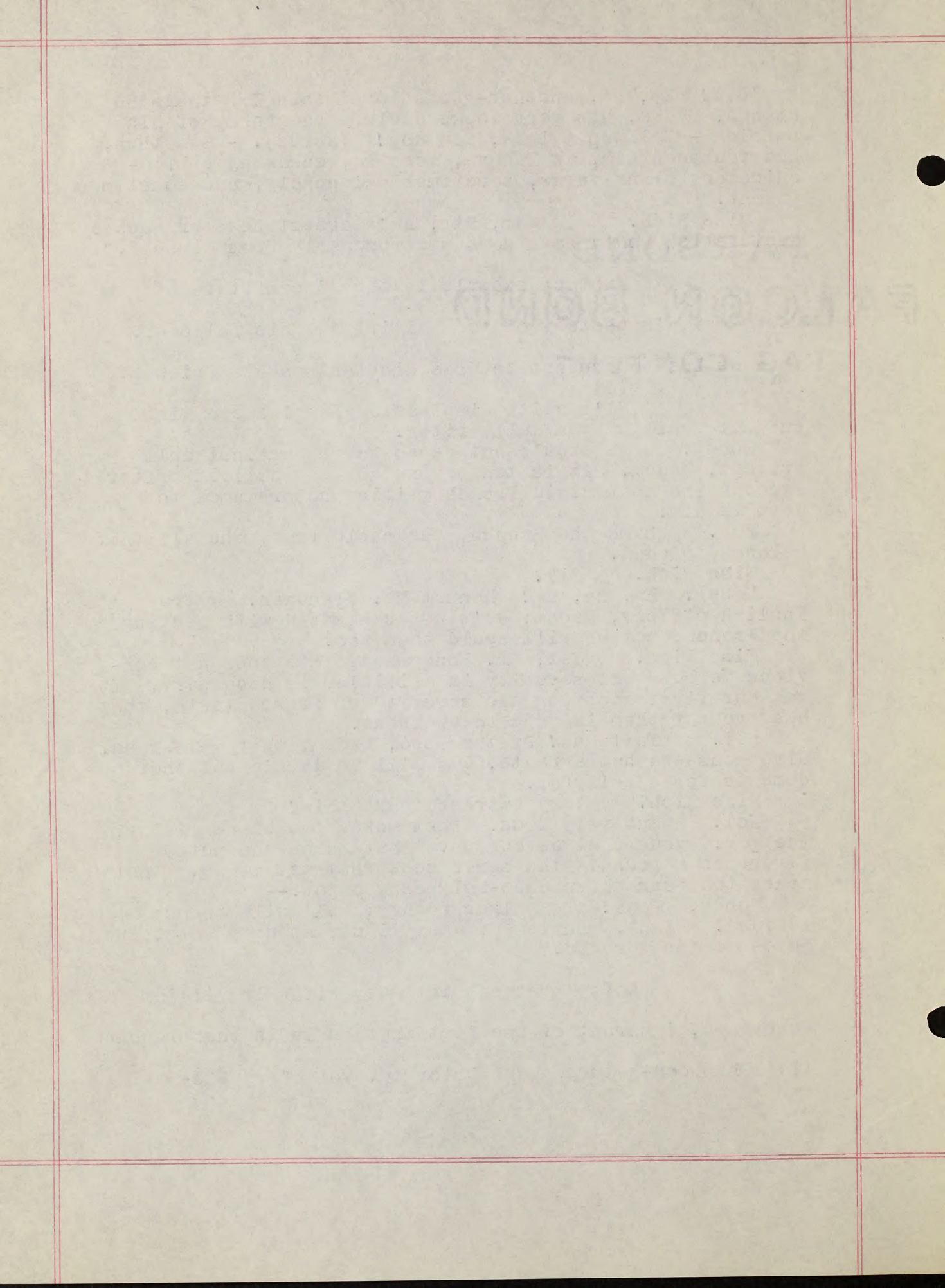
Fol. But very true. What makes the bread rising? the *parle vous* that devour us. What makes the mutton fivepence a pound? the *parle vous* that eat it up. What makes the beer threepence-halfpenny a pot?--

Honey. Ah! the vulgar rogues; all will be out (aside). Right, gentleman, very right, upon my word, and quite to the purpose."

Lofty pretends intimacy with Sir William Honeywood, ignorant of the fact that he is in the presence

(1) The Good-natured Man Prior ed. vol IV p 223-224







of Sir William.

(1)

"Miss Rich. I have heard of Sir William Honeywood; he's abroad in employment: he confided in your judgment, I suppose?

Lofty. Why, yes, madam, I believe Sir William had some reason to confide in my judgment; one little reason, perhaps.

Miss Rich. Pray, Sir, what was it?

Lofty. Why, Madam - but let it go no further - it was I procured him his place.

Sir Wm. Did you, Sir?

Lofty. Either you or I, Sir.

Miss Rich. This, Mr. Lofty, was very kind indeed.

Lofty. I did love him, to be sure; he had some amusing qualities; no man was fitter to be a toast-master to a club, or had a better head.

Miss Rich. A better head?

Lofty. Ay, at a bottle. To be sure, he was as dull as a choice spirit; but, hang it, he was grateful, very grateful; and gratitude hides a multitude of faults.

Sir Wm. He might have reason, perhaps. His place is pretty considerable, I'm told.

Lofty. A trifle, a mere trifle among us men of business. The truth is, he wanted dignity to fill up a greater."

### She Stoops to Conquer

While he was writing "She Stoops to Conquer," Goldsmith complained in a letter: "Every soul is visiting about and merry but myself. And that is hard too, as I have been trying these three months to do something to make people laugh." One cannot but agree with Miss. Memsterberg  
(2)  
who says of this letter, "It would have pleased him to know that after a century and a half, the world would still agree with the judgment of his good friend Johnson: 'I

(1) The Good-natured Man Prior ed. vol. IV p 229-230

(2) Memsterberg, Margaret - Oliver Goldsmith The Good-natured Man p 249





know of no comedy for many years....that has answered so much the great end of comedy, making an audience merry."

The leading incident in this play, the mistaking a gentleman's house for an inn was taken from a personal experience of the author, who, as a youth, travelling to school, made a similiar blunder. In the play Tony is the villian who directs the strangers to his stepfather's home, which he represents to be an inn.

(1)

"Tony. You do, do you? - then, let me see - what if you go on a mile further, to the Buck's Head; the old Buck's Head on the hill, one of the best inns in the whole county?

Hast. O ho!, so we have escaped an adventure for this night, however.

Landlord. (Apart to Tony) Sure, you ben't sending them to your father's as an inn, be you?

Tony. Mum, you fool you. Let them find that out. (To them) You have only to keep on straight forward, till you come to a large old house by the roadside. You'll see a pair of large horns over the door. That's the sign. Drive up the yard, and call stoutly about you.

Hast. Sir we are obliged to you. The servants can't miss the way?

Tony. No, no; but I tell you, though, the landlord is rich and going to leave off business: so he wants to be thought a gentleman, saving your presence, he! he! he! He'll be for giving you his company; and, ecod, if you mind him, he'll persuade you that his mother was an alderman, and his aunt a justice of peace.

Land. A troublesome old blade, to be sure; but a keeps as good wines and beds as any in the whole country."

Believing Hardcastle to be a garrulous landlord, Marlow and Hastings pay no attention to him as he tries to entertain them with stories of his military exploits.

(1) She Stoops to Conquer Prior ed. vol IV p 283-284



know of no other for every year... that last night as  
such the great end of comedy, showing an audience nearly  
The lesson in this story, the

mistaking a gentleman's house for an inn as told from  
a personal experience of the author, who, as a youth,

travelling to school, made a similar mistake. In the

also, Tony is the villain and almost the antagonist to his

stepfather's home, which he represents to be an inn.

(1)

"You do, do you? - when, let me see - when  
it was on a fine day, to the Duke's Hall; the old  
Duke's Hall on the hill, one of the best in the whole  
country."

What? A little as we have escaped an adventure for

this night, however.

Landlord. (Agreeing to Tony's) But, you see's standing

then to your father's as an inn, he told

Tony. Yes, you told me. Let them find that out.

(To them) You have only to keep on straight forward, till  
you come to a large old house by the roadside. You'll

see a pair of large horns over the door. That's the sign.

Drive up the yard, and call loudly about you.

What? Sir we are obliged to you. The servants

can't miss the way?

Tony. No, no; but I tell you, though, the landlord

is rich and going to leave off business; so he wants to

be thought a gentleman, saving your presence, he'll not

be for giving you his company; and, added, if you

mind him, he'll persuade you that his mother was an elder-

son, and that a justice of peace.

Land. A thousand old wives, to be sure; but a

keeper as good as any and as good as any in the whole country."

Believing themselves to be a gentleman's house-

lord, Marlow and Hastings pay no attention to him as he

tries to entertain them with stories of his military exploits

(1)

"Hard. Your talking of a retreat, Mr. Marlow, puts me in mind of the Duke of Marlborough, when we went to besiege Denain. He first summoned the garrison-

Marl. Don't you think the ventre d'or waistcoat will do with the plain brown?

Hard. He first summoned the garrison, which might consist of about five thousand men -

Hast. I think not: brown and yellow mix but very poorly.

Hard. I say, gentlemen, as I was telling you, he summoned the garrison, which might consist of about five thousand men -

Marl. The girls like finery.

Hard. Which might consist of about five thousand men, well appointed with stores, ammunition, and other implements of war. Now, says the Duke of Marlborough to George Brooks, that stood next to him - You must have heard of George Brooks - I'll pawn my dukedom, says he, but I take that garrison without spilling a drop of blood. So -

Marl. What, my good friend, if you give us a glass of punch in the mean time; it would help us to carry on the siege with vigor.

Hard. Punch, Sir! (aside) This is the most unaccountable kind of modesty I ever met with.

Marl. Yes, Sir, punch. A glass of warm punch, after our journey, will be comfortable. This is Liberty-hall, you know."

One of the most humorous situations in the play occurs when Mrs. Hardcastle, who believes she has ridden far from home, is taken to her own back yard and mistakes her husband for a robber.

(2)

"Mrs. Hard. (From behind.) Oh! he's coming to find me out. Oh!

Tony. What need you go, Sir, if I tell you? Hem. I'll lay down my life for the truth - hem - I'll tell you all, Sir. (Detaining him.)

Hard. I tell you I will not be detained. I insist on seeing. It's in vain to expect I'll believe you.

(1) She Stoops to Conquer Prior ed. vol IV p 290

(2) " " " " " " " IV p 343





Mrs. Hard. (Running forward from behind.) O lud! he'll murder my poor boy, my darling! here, good gentleman, whet your rage upon me. Take my money, my life, but spare that young gentleman; spare my child, if you have any mercy.

Hard. My wife, as I'm a Christian. From whence can she come? or what does she mean?

Mrs. Hard. (Kneeling.) Take compassion on us, good Mr. Highwayman. Take our money, our watches, all we have, but spare our lives. We will never bring you to justice; indeed we won't, good Mr. Highwayman.

Hard. I believe the woman's out of her senses. What, Dorothy! don't you know me?

Mrs. Hard. Mr. Hardcastle, as I'm alive! My fears blinded me. But who, my dear, could have expected to meet you here, in this frightful place, so far from home? What has brought you to follow us?

Hard. Sure, Dorothy, you have not lost your wits? So far from home, when you are within forty yards of your own door."





### Incongruities in the use of words

The humor that is found in playing with words themselves is derived from the contrasting meanings which the same sound may have and the incongruous things which are thereby connected with each other. This is an intellectual form of humor that may be cultivated with practice since it is concerned chiefly with nice distinctions between words. Goldsmith's sense of humor was not of this type. There are few puns in his works, and no attempts at brilliant witticism. He was interested in men and found sympathetic humor in their characters and in their actions. Words were tools, not subjects of humor for Goldsmith.

One of the few examples of incongruity in the use of words is the play on the word 'bounce' in a bit of light verse.

(1)

"But hold - let me pause - don't I hear you pronounce

This tale of the bacon a damnable bounce?

Well! suppose it a bounce - sure a poet may try,

By a bounce now and then, to get courage to fly.

But, my Lord, it's no bounce: I protest in my turn,

It's a truth - and your lordship may ask Mr. Burn."

In 'Retaliation' each guest is to bring a dish which is himself.

(1) The Haunch of Venison Prior ed vol. IV p 85



English in the use of words

The person that is found is playing with

words themselves is denied for the corresponding meaning  
which the word found in the dictionary is different  
from the word which is found in the dictionary. This is an  
interesting fact of human language that we are familiar with  
because it is concerned chiefly with the use of  
words. The word 'gold' is used in many different  
not of this word. There are two parts in the word, and  
no other parts in the word. The word 'gold' is used  
in many and found in many different parts in the word  
and in many different parts in the word. The word 'gold' is  
used in many different parts in the word.

One of the most important of the word is

the use of words in the word 'gold' is

the use of words in the word 'gold' is

"The word 'gold' is used in many different parts in the word

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The word 'gold' is used in many different parts in the word

(1)

"Our Burke shall be tongue, with a garnish  
of brains; "

Besides these two in the light verse  
there are a few in the plays.

(2)

"Blame where you must, be candid where you  
can,  
And be each critic the Good-natured Man."

Marlow and Hastings discuss the bill of  
fare at Mr. Hardcastle's.

(3)

"Marl. (Reading) At the bottom a calf's  
tongue and brains.

Hast. Let your brains be knocked out,  
my good Sir, I don't like them. "

In the criticism of Wilkie's 'Epigoniad',  
Goldsmith calls the author a handy poet because of his  
frequent use of the word 'hands'.

(4)

"Our handy poet seems to have profited by  
this observation; and therefore we need not wonder to  
see him, like a good steersman, so constantly keep his  
hands to the rudder. -----To the foregoing citations we  
could have added many others of the same sort; but  
these are more than sufficient to convince the critics  
at George's and the Bedford, that verses have hands as  
well as feet."

(1) Retaliation Prior ed. vol. IV p 111

(2) Epilogue to The Good-natured Man Prior ed. vol. IV  
p151

(3) She Stoops to Conquer Prior ed. vol. IV p

(4) Poetical Criticism Prior ed. vol IV p 391



(1)  
"Our little shall be common, with a garnish  
of chains;"

Besides these two in the light verse

there are a few in the light.

(2)  
"Alas! where you must, be candid where you  
can,  
and be each other's Good-Neighbor."

Barlow and Hastings discuss the title of

late at Mr. Hawthorne's.

(3)  
"Barl. (Hastings) At the bottom a call's  
tongue and tongue.  
Hast. Let your tongue be cracked out,  
my good Sir, I don't like them."

In the criticism of Willie's "epigrams."

Colapinto tells the author a handy poet because of his

frequent use of the word "handy."

(4)  
"Our handy poet seems to have written by  
care observation, and therefore we need not wonder to  
see him like a good assistant, so consistently keep his  
hands to the wheel. ---- In the foregoing criticism as  
we have added many others of the same sort; but  
there are two then entitled to advance the criticism  
at George's and the handy. But verses have hands as  
well as feet."

- (1) Hawthorne, Twice ed. vol. IV p. 111
- (2) Epigrams by the Good-Neighbor and Twice ed. vol. IV p. 111
- (3) Handy poet seems to have written by
- (4) Handy poet seems to have written by

## VI Goldsmith's technique of humor

In order to get the proper effects Goldsmith uses various methods familiar to all humorists. Because of his skill his technique is not obvious and it is not always possible to say just exactly how he achieved a certain result. Throughout his works he uses the following devices, sometimes alone and sometimes in combinations.

### Assumed seriousness

Humor is most effective when the author completely masks his true feelings toward his subject under an assumed seriousness, and pretends to be truly puzzled by the behaviour of his victim. Goldsmith used this method most effectively in "Citizen of the World." There is an element of slyness in all humor that makes the reader who sees through the mask feel he is sharing a confidence with the humorist. It is this delightful indirectness that makes it interesting to reread a passage of humor, as always there is some detail that becomes more obviously funny upon reflection.

Most of the humor in Citizen of the World gains by having this element in it. A typical example of the way in which humor may be heightened by this method is seen in the perplexity of the Chinese





philosopher in the following incident taken from the essay about the absurdities of the theater:

(1)

" -- a man came in balancing a straw upon his nose, and the audience were clapping their hands in all the raptures of applause. To what purpose, cried I, does this unmeaning figure make his appearance? Is he a part of the plot? Unmeaning, do you call him? replied my friend in black; this is one of the most important characters of the whole play; nothing pleases the people more than seeing a straw balanced: there is a great deal of meaning in the straw; there is something suited to every apprehension in the sight; and a fellow possessed of talents like these is sure of making his fortune."

There is ridicule for the war going on between two rival theatres.

(2)

" If they produce a pair of diamond buckles at one house, we have a pair of eyebrows that can match them at the other. If we outdo them in our attitude, they can overcome us by a shrug; if we can bring more children on the stage, they can bring more guards in red clothes, who strut and shoulder their swords to the astonishment of every spectator."

In the essay concerning quacks the Chinese philosopher cannot understand why there should be any sick in England.

(3)

" When I consider the assiduity of this profession, their benevolence amazes me. They not only in general give their medicines for half value, but use the most persuasive remonstrances to induce the sick to come and be cured. Sure there must be something strangely obstinate in an English patient, who refuses so much health upon such easy terms. Does he take a pride in being bloated with dropsy? does he find pleasure in the alternations of an intermittent fever? or feel as much satisfaction in nursing up his gout, as he found pleasure in acquiring it? He must; otherwise he would never reject such repeated assurances of instant relief."

(1) Citizen of the World Prior ed. vol I p 91

(2) " " " " " " " II p 327

(3) " " " " " " " II p 101



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### Surprise element

In some kinds of humor much depends upon the suddenness and unexpectedness with which the reader sees the contrast between what is and what should be. Goldsmith uses this method particularly in his play and in stories which he intends to illustrate points in the essays.

The author is introduced into a club where all are silent.

(1)

"Happy society! thought I to myself, where the members think before they speak, deliver nothing rashly, but convey their thoughts to each other, pregnant with meaning, and matured by reflection.

In this pleasing speculation I continued a full half hour, expecting each moment that somebody would begin to open his mouth: every time the pipe was laid down I expected it was to speak; but it was only to spit. ---- I now began to be uneasy in this dumb society, till one of them a little relieved me by observing, that bread had not risen these three weeks; 'Aye,' says another, still keeping the pipe in his mouth, 'that puts me in mind of a pleasant story about that - hem - very well; you must know - but, before I begin - Sir, my service to you - where was I?'"

The devout patriotism of those who stay at home in celebration of victory is suddenly deflated.

(2)

"--if some, bravely fighting for their country, lose their lives and fall dead on the field of battle in its defence, we have our bouts as well as they, and can produce our hundreds who have upon this occasion bravely become votaries for their country, and with true patriotism not disdained to fall dead - drunk in every house."

(1) Essays Prior ed. vol I p 172

(2) " " " " I p 177





The spinster boasts of her former conquests.

(1)

"She tells of the knight in gold lace, who died with a single frown, and never rose again till - he was married to his maid; of the 'squire, who being cruelly denied, in a rage flew to the window, and lifting up the sash, threw himself in an agony - into his arm-chair; of the parson, who, crossed in love, resolutely swallowed opium, which banished the stings of despised love by - making him sleep."

A great man receives a letter threatening him with death by poison. In this letter he is told to fold up the letter and give it to his dog who will die three hours and four minutes after eating it.

(2)

"You may easily imagine the consternation into which this letter threw the whole good-natured family. The poor man to whom it was addressed was the more surprised, as not knowing how he could merit such inveterate malice. All the friends of the family were convened; it was universally agreed that it was a most terrible affair, and that the government should be solicited to offer a reward and a pardon: a fellow of this kind would go on poisoning family after family; and it was impossible to say where the destruction would end. In pursuance of these determinations, the government was applied to; strict search was made after the incendiary, but all in vain. At last, therefore, they recollected that the experiment was not yet tried upon the dog; the Dutch mastiff was brought up, and placed in the midst of the friends and relations, the seal was torn off, the packet folded up with care, and soon they found to the great surprise of all - that the dog would not eat the letter."

George's determination to teach English in Holland meets with an unexpected obstacle.

(3)

"I agreed with his proposal, and embarked the next day to teach the Dutch English in Holland.

- (1) Citizen of the World Prior ed. vol II p 121
- (2) Citizen of the World Prior ed. vol II p 424
- (3) Vicar of Wakefield " " " III p 127





The wind was fair, our voyage short, and after having paid my passage with half my movables, I found myself, as fallen from the skies, a stranger in one of the principal streets of Amsterdam. In this situation I was unwilling to let any time pass unemployed in teaching. I addressed myself, therefore, to two or three of those I met, whose appearance seemed most promising; but it was impossible to make ourselves mutually understood. It was not till this very moment I recollected, that in order to teach the Dutchmen English, it was necessary that they should first teach me Dutch. How I came to overlook so obvious an objection, is to me amazing; but certain it is I overlooked it."

Goldsmith attends a dinner for which he has supplied the venison for a pasty.

(1)

"At the top a fried liver and bacon were seen,  
At the bottom was a tripe, in a swinging tureen;  
At the sides there was spinage, and pudding made hot;  
In the middle, a place where the Pasty - was not."

Surprise is the chief element in the humor of an Elegy on the Glory of Her Sex, Mrs. Mary Blaize.

(2)

"She strove the neighborhood to please,  
With manners wondrous winning;  
And never follow'd wicked ways,-  
Unless when she was sinning."

At church, in silks and satins new,  
With hoop of monstrous size;  
She never slumbered in her pew,-  
But when she shut her eyes."

(1) The Haunch of Venison Prior ed. vol. LV p 88

(2) An Elegy " " " Iv p 132





### Exaggeration

The trick of making incongruities immeasurably worse than they really are, all the time assuming an air of innocent gravity, is one of the most common ways of getting a humorous effect. Goldsmith uses this method occasionally and appears to enjoy himself hugely in letting his imagination run riot in ludicrous exaggeration. Evidently he loved to flavor his conversation with this kind of humor to the disgust of Boswell.

The Chinese philosopher is impressed by the amount of money that is paid to dancers.

(1)

"-- dancing is a very reputable and genteel employment here; men have a greater chance for encouragement from the merit of their heels than their heads. One who jumps up and flourishes his toes three times before he comes to the ground, may have three hundred a year; he who flourishes them four times, gets four hundred; but he who arrives at five is inestimable, and may demand what salary he thinks proper."

The difficulties of a first publication are enumerated.

(2)

"I was at a loss whether to give the public specious promises, or give none; whether to be merry or sad on this solemn occasion. If I should decline all merit, it was too probable the hasty reader might have taken me at my word. If, on the other hand, like laborers in the Magazine trade, I had, with modest impudence, humbly presumed to promise an epitome of all the good things that ever were said or written, this might have disgusted those readers I most desire to

(1) Citizen of the World Prior ed. volIII p92

(2) The Bee " " " I pl4





please. Had I been merry, I might have been censured as vastly low; and had I been sorrowful, I might have been left to mourn in solitude and silence: in short, whichever way I turned, nothing presented but prospects of terror, despair, chandlers' shops, and waste paper."

Goldsmiths considers the large number of little great men.

(1)

"There is scarcely a village in Europe, and not one university, that is not thus furnished with its little great men. The head of a petty corporation, who opposes the designs of a prince, who would tyrannically force his subjects to save their best clothes for Sundays; the puny pedant, who finds one undiscovered property in the polype, describes an unheeded process in the skeleton of a mole, and whose mind, like his microscope, perceives nature only in detail; the rhymer, who makes smooth verses, and paints to our imagination when he should only speak to our hearts; all equally fancy themselves walking forward to immortality, and desire the crowd behind them to look on. The crowd takes them at their word. Patriot, philosopher, and poet, are shouted in their train. Where was there ever so much merit seen; no times so important as our own; ages yet unborn shall gaze with wonder and applause! To such music the important pigmy moves forward, bustling and swelling, and aptly compared to a puddle in a storm."

The Chinese philosopher tells how the English get political information.

(2)

"This universal passion for politics is gratified by daily gazettes, as with us at China. But as in ours the emperor endeavors to instruct the administration. You must not, however, imagine, that they who compile these papers have any actual knowledge of the politics, or the government of a state; they only collect their materials from the oracle of some coffee-house; which oracle has himself gathered them the night before from a bean at a gaming table, who has pillaged his information from the great man's gentleman, who had invented the whole story for his own amusement the night preceding."

(1) The Bee Prior ed. vol. I p 120

(2) Citizen of the World Prior ed. vol II p 27





The jealousy of writers is deplored.

(1)

"They calumniate, they injure, they despise, they ridicule each other; if one man writes a book that pleases, others shall write books to show that he might have given still greater pleasure, or should not have pleased. If one happens to hit upon something new, there are numbers ready to assure the public, that all this was no novelty to them or the learned; that Cardanus, or Brunus, or some other author too dull to be generally read, had anticipated the discovery."

## Understatement

More subtle and less easy to detect is the use of understatement. It is consequently more powerful in humorous effect. It requires restraint upon the part of the humorist, a willingness to leave much unsaid which is to be supplied by the imagination of the reader. Goldsmith's work is not lacking in examples of the art of understatement.

The way in which wars are brought about is a typical example of the humor of understatement

(2)

"Yet, notwithstanding those treaties, the people of Europe are almost continually at war. There is nothing more easy than to break a treaty ratified in all the usual forms, and yet neither part be the aggressor. One side, for instance, breaks a trifling article by mistake; the opposite party, upon this, makes a small but premeditated reprisal; this brings on a return of greater from the other; both sides complain of injuries and infractions; war is declared; they beat; are beaten; some two or three hundred thousand men are killed; they grow tired; leave off just where they began; and so sit coolly down to make new treaties."

(1) Citizen of the World Prior ed. vol II p 27

(2) " " " " " " " II p 71













The Vicar describes Mr. Wilmot, whose mercenary nature asserts itself when the Vicar loses his fortune.

(1)

"It would be endless to describe the different sensations of both families, when I divulged the news of our misfortune; but what others felt was slight to what the lovers appeared to endure. Mr. Wilmot, who seemed before sufficiently inclined to break off the match, was by this blow soon determined; one virtue he had in perfection, which was prudence, too often the only one that is left us at seventy-two."

### Repetition

The use of the same word or the same phrase several times in succession has a cumulative effect upon the resulting humor. Goldsmith uses this method frequently in the plays.

In this manner the Chinese philosopher is defended.

(2)

"The Chinese are always concise; so is he. Simple; so is he. The Chinese are grave and sententious; so is he. But in one particular the resemblance is peculiarly striking: the Chinese are often dull; and so is he. Nor has my assistance been wanting."

Mr. Burchell expresses his disapproval of the ladies from town by interrupting their conversation with the work 'fudge'.

(3)

" 'Besides, my dear Skeggs,' continued our Peeress, 'there is nothing of this in the copy of verses that Dr. Burdock made upon the occasion.' Fudge!

'My dear creature,' replied our Peeress, 'do you think I carry such things about me? Though they are

(1) Vicar of Wakefield Prior ed. vol. I & I p 269

(2) Citizen of the World Prior ed. vol. II p 14

(3) Vicar of Wakefield Prior ed. vol. III p 69





very fine to be sure, and I think myself something of a judge; at least I know what pleases myself. Indeed, I was ever an admirer of all Doctor Burdock's little pieces; for except what he does, and our dear Countess at Hanover-square, there's nothing comes out but the most lowest stuff in nature; not a bit of high life among them.' Fudge!

'Your Ladyship should except,' says t'other, 'your own things in the Lady's Magazine. I hope you'll say there's nothing low-lived there? But I suppose we are to have no more from that quarter?' Fudge! "

George's cousin tells him the disagreeable features connected with the position of usher.

(1)

"But are you sure you are fit for a school? Let me examine you a little. Have you been bred apprentice to the business? No. Then you won't do for a school. Can you dress the boys' hair? No. Then you won't do for a school. Have you had the small-pox? No. Then you won't do for a school. Can you lie three in a bed? No. Then you won't do for a school. Have you got a good stomach? Yes. Then you will by no means do for a school. "

Croaker replies 'May be not' to all efforts to cheer him.

(2)

"Honey. I heartily concur in the wish, though, I own, not in your apprehensions.

Cro. May be not. Indeed, what signifies what weather we have in a country going to ruin like ours? Taxes rising and trade falling. Money flying out of the kingdom, and Jesuits swarming into it. I know at this time no less than a hundred and twenty-seven Jesuits between Charing-cross and Temple-bar.

Honey. The Jesuits will scarce pervert you or me, I should hope.

Cro. May be not. Indeed, what signifies whom they pervert in a country that has scarce any religion to lose? I'm only afraid for our wives and daughters.

Honey. I have no apprehensions for the ladies, I assure you.

Cro. May be not. Indeed, what signifies whether they be perverted or no? The women in my time were

(1) Vicar of Wakefield Prior ed. vol. III p 119

(2) The Good-natured Man Prior ed. vol IV p 195



very fine to be sure, and I think myself a certain of a future; at least I know what I want myself. Indeed, I was even an admirer of all those famous ladies of the past; for except what is good, and our best countrymen at present, there's nothing comes out of the most famous school in nature; not a bit of high life among them.

"Your ladyship should excuse," says I, "I own I was in the lady's position. I hope you'll say there's nothing low-lived there, but I suppose we are to have no more from that quarter."

"Ladyship's cousin tells me the same story."

"I'm sure connected with the position of power."

"But are you sure you are fit for a school?"  
"Let me examine you a little. Have you been ever acquainted to the business of a school? Then you won't do for a school. Can you dress the lady? Well, then you won't do for a school. Do you have the small-pox? No. Then you won't do for a school. Can you live three in a bed? No. Then you won't do for a school. Have you got a good stomach? Yes. Then you will do no means do for a school."

"Greatest replies," says he, "to all efforts."

"to cheer him."  
(2)

"Honey, I heartily consent in the wish, though I am not in your apprehensions. No. May be not. Indeed, what signifies what weather we have in a country, when to the like case? These things and things failed. Honey, living out of the kingdom, and Jael's swearing into it. I know of this time no less than a hundred and twenty-seven years between their crosses and Jael's day. Honey, the Jael's will surely never get you or me, I should hope. No. May be not. Indeed, what signifies when they get out in a country that has no sense any religion to foster. I'm only afraid for our wives and daughters. Honey, I have no apprehensions for the ladies, I assure you. No. May be not. Indeed, what signifies whether they be perceived or not the women in my class were

good for something. I have seen a lady dressed from top to toe in her own manufactures formerly. But now-a-days the devil a thing of their own manufacture's about them, except their faces. "

The word 'fool' is repeated with humorous effect

(1)

"Miss Rich ----Who, my dear Sir, could have expected meeting you here? to what accident do we owe this pleasure?

Cro. To a fool, I believe

Miss Rich. But to what purpose did you come?

Cro. To play the fool.

Miss Rich. But with whom?

Cro. With greater fools than myself. "

Mr. Hardcastle describes Harlow to his daughter.

(2)

Hard "----The young gentleman has been bred a scholar, and is designed for an employment in the service of his country. I am told he's a man of an excellent understanding.

Miss Hard. Is he?

Hard Very generous.

Miss Hard. I believe I shall like him.

Hard. Young and brave.

Miss Hard. I'm sure I shall like him.

Hard. And very handsome.

Miss Hard. My dear papa, say no more (kissing his hand) he's mine; I'll have him. "

(1) The Good-natured Man Prior ed. vol IV p 256

(2) She Stoops to Conquer " " " IV p 275



...for ... I have seen a lady ...  
...in her own ...  
...the devil ...  
...their faces."

The word 'fool' is repeated with variations

...

(1)

"This is ... my dear ... could have  
... that ...  
... this ...  
... to a fool, I believe  
... But to what purpose ... you ...  
... to say the ...  
... I ...  
... with ... than myself."

Mr. Rochester's reaction ... to his

...

(2)

"...The young gentleman has been ...  
... a scholar, ... for an ... in the  
... of his country. I am ... a man of an  
...  
... is ...  
... very ...  
... I believe I shall like him  
... and brave.  
... I am sure I shall like him.  
... and very handsome.  
... at heart ... say no more (kissing his  
... hand; I'll have him."

(1) The word-repeated ...  
(2) The ... to ...

VII Summary

Humor is based upon some incongruity in life. The humorist is a keen observer of reality who points out the contrast between what is and what should be. Humor may be divided into wit and real humor according to the attitude of the humorist toward his subject. The wit laughs at people; the real humorist laughs with them. Goldsmith was a real humorist. He seldom used harsh satire and he disapproved of puns.

Several influences in Goldsmith's life affected his humor. From his father he may have inherited the sympathy for people which is so characteristic of the real humorist, and from his mother, the sense of reality which every humorist must possess. He was brought up in Ireland where he learned the trick which Irish humorists have of finding humor in subjects not commonly considered humorous. He was not an ambitious student and he spent much of his time telling stories while in school, and later, on the continent where he travelled about getting to know all kinds and conditions of men.

The peculiarities in his behaviour and talk are thought by most biographers to have been a mani-





festation of his sense of humor rather than evidences of egotism and crudity, as was held by some of his contemporaries.

The main part of this thesis is composed of quotations from Goldsmith's works which show the kind of social customs, characters, and incidents which he considered humorous. Along with these quotations, comments have been made, attempting to show how Goldsmith treated the subjects of his humor. In "The Essays", "The Bee", and "The Citizen of the World" Goldsmith considers incongruities of society which he treats with a mild satire. The subjects for this kind of humor which are most frequently used are the theater, fawning upon the great, personal vanities, provincialism of the English, quack doctors, ministers and religion, and marriage. Goldsmith's humor is at its best in the delineation of humorous characters. Beau Tibbs is the incarnation of the folly of fawning upon ~~the great~~ which Goldsmith most vigorously deplored in all his works. The Vicar is the most subtle of Goldsmith's humorous characters, and he is the most representative of the sympathy with which the true humorist treats his subjects. Outstanding humorous characters from the plays are Croaker, Jack Lofty, and Tony Lumpkin.





Goldsmith used the humor of incongruous incidents almost exclusively in the plays which consequently are farcical in type. In play-writing Goldsmith's chief desire was to get humor back into the drama.

A final group of quotations illustrate typical ways in which Goldsmith secured his humorous effects. He had no new technique of humor. He used the well-known devices of assumed seriousness, surprise, exaggeration, understatement, and repetition.

- Oliver Goldsmith (Englishman and Irishman) ed. by  
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- Goldsmith, Oliver  
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Holt, Rinehart & Co. London 1910
- Goldsmith, Oliver  
Oliver Goldsmith (Collected Writings ed. by David  
G. Nichol, 2 vols. 1-2 182-320 London 4 and 5 Steps 1897
- Goldsmith, Oliver  
Life and Times of Oliver Goldsmith  
Ward, Lock & Co. London 1894
- Goldsmith, Oliver  
Oliver Goldsmith (An Essay) - printed at the  
University of the North Carolina Library - N. C.
- Goldsmith, Oliver  
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